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The
Distant
Hills.

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A decorative border of stylized flowers and vines surrounds the central text area.

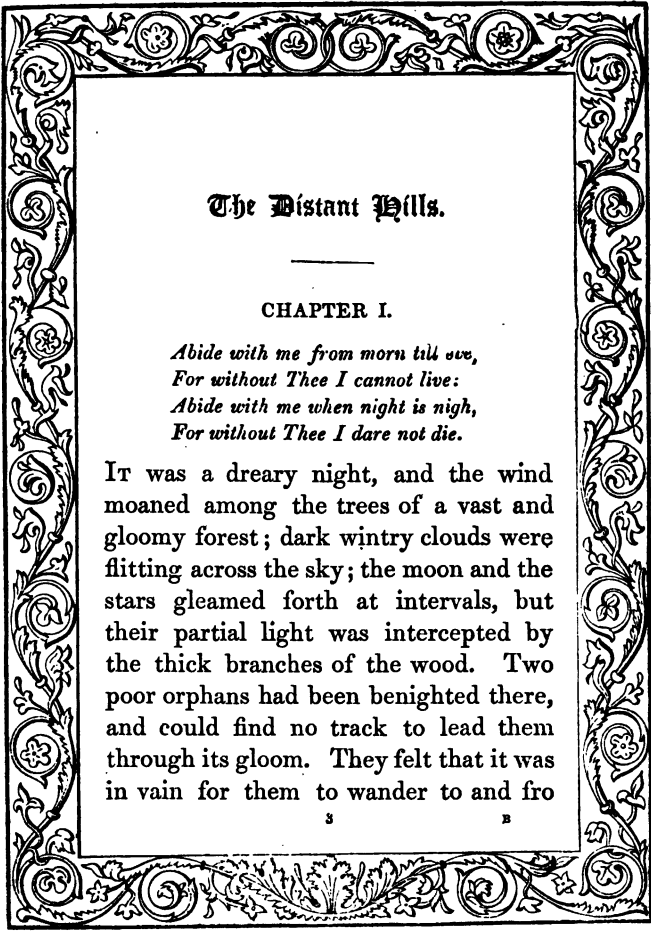
The
Distant Hills.

BY THE
REV. W. ADAMS, M.A.
FELLOW OF MERION COLLEGE,
OXFORD,
AUTHOR OF THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS.

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from
the Lord,
which made heaven and earth.
Psalm cxxi. 1, 2.

LONDON:
J. G. F. & J. RIVINGTON.
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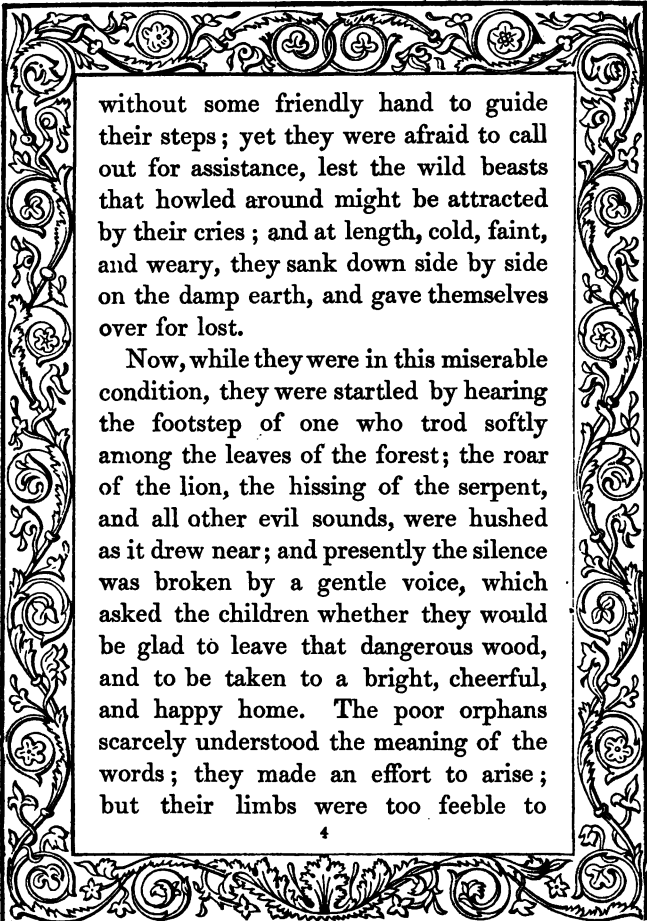


The Distant Hills.

CHAPTER I.

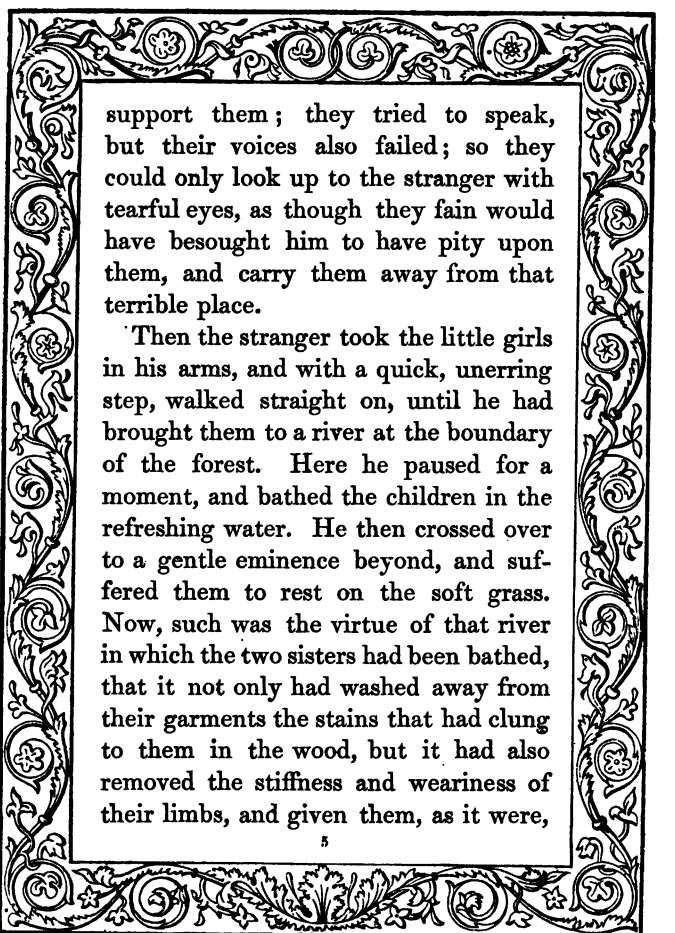
*Abide with me from morn till eve,
For without Thee I cannot live:
Abide with me when night is nigh,
For without Thee I dare not die.*

It was a dreary night, and the wind moaned among the trees of a vast and gloomy forest; dark wintry clouds were flitting across the sky; the moon and the stars gleamed forth at intervals, but their partial light was intercepted by the thick branches of the wood. Two poor orphans had been benighted there, and could find no track to lead them through its gloom. They felt that it was in vain for them to wander to and fro



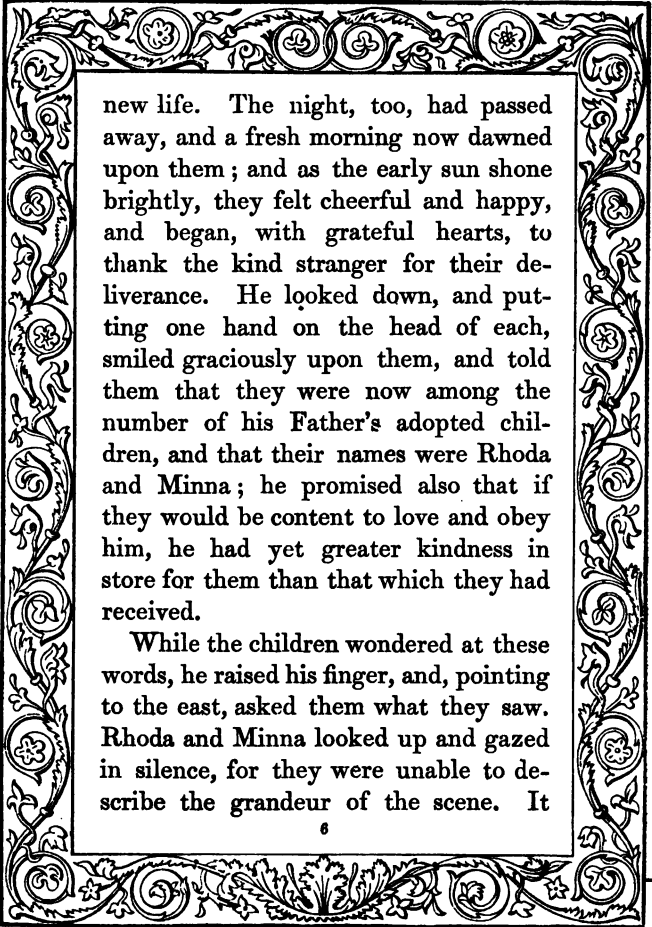
without some friendly hand to guide their steps ; yet they were afraid to call out for assistance, lest the wild beasts that howled around might be attracted by their cries ; and at length, cold, faint, and weary, they sank down side by side on the damp earth, and gave themselves over for lost.

Now, while they were in this miserable condition, they were startled by hearing the footstep of one who trod softly among the leaves of the forest ; the roar of the lion, the hissing of the serpent, and all other evil sounds, were hushed as it drew near ; and presently the silence was broken by a gentle voice, which asked the children whether they would be glad to leave that dangerous wood, and to be taken to a bright, cheerful, and happy home. The poor orphans scarcely understood the meaning of the words ; they made an effort to arise ; but their limbs were too feeble to



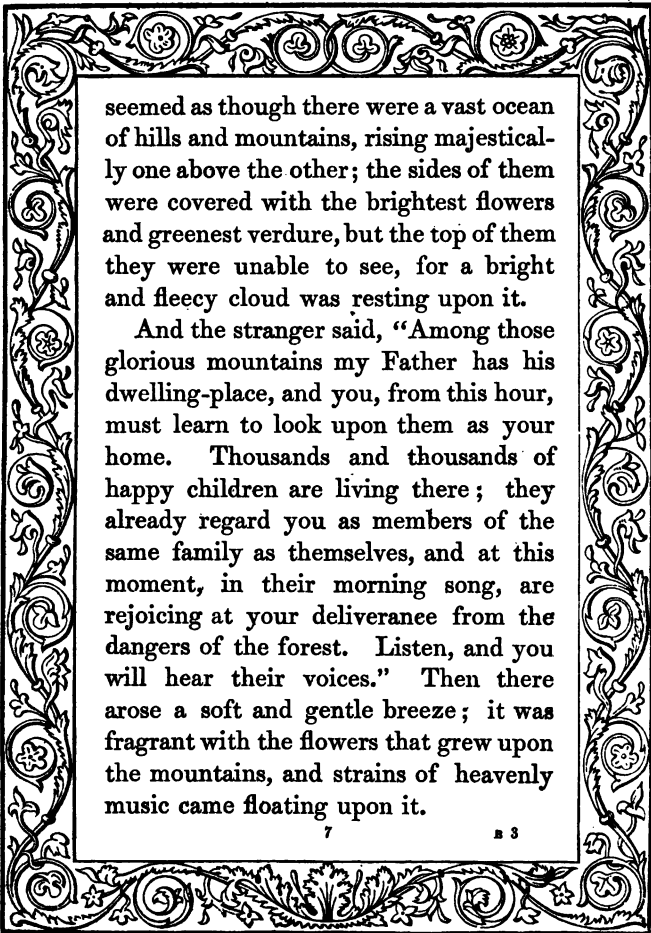
support them ; they tried to speak, but their voices also failed ; so they could only look up to the stranger with tearful eyes, as though they fain would have besought him to have pity upon them, and carry them away from that terrible place.

Then the stranger took the little girls in his arms, and with a quick, unerring step, walked straight on, until he had brought them to a river at the boundary of the forest. Here he paused for a moment, and bathed the children in the refreshing water. He then crossed over to a gentle eminence beyond, and suffered them to rest on the soft grass. Now, such was the virtue of that river in which the two sisters had been bathed, that it not only had washed away from their garments the stains that had clung to them in the wood, but it had also removed the stiffness and weariness of their limbs, and given them, as it were,



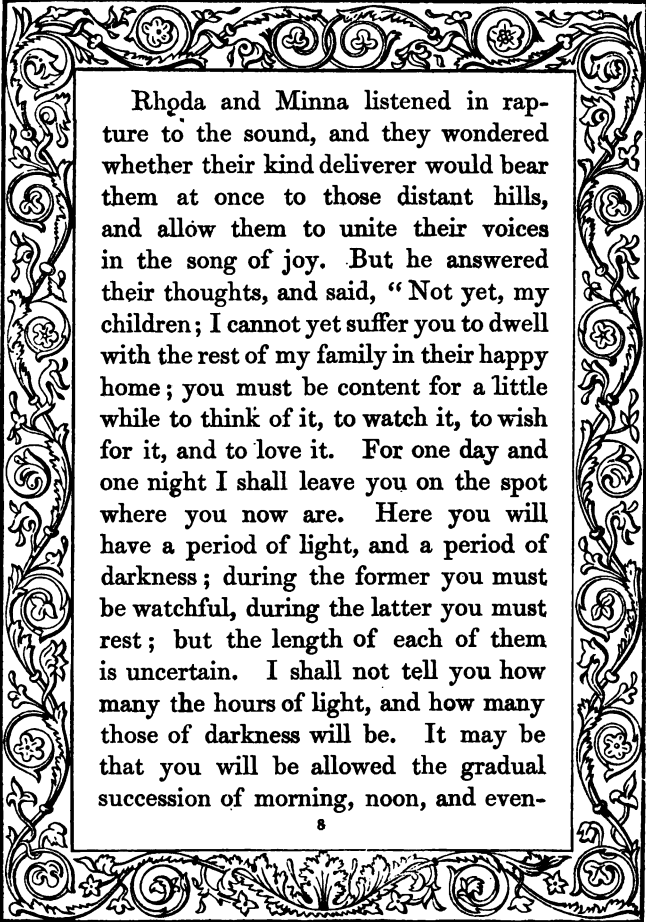
new life. The night, too, had passed away, and a fresh morning now dawned upon them ; and as the early sun shone brightly, they felt cheerful and happy, and began, with grateful hearts, to thank the kind stranger for their deliverance. He looked down, and putting one hand on the head of each, smiled graciously upon them, and told them that they were now among the number of his Father's adopted children, and that their names were Rhoda and Minna ; he promised also that if they would be content to love and obey him, he had yet greater kindness in store for them than that which they had received.

While the children wondered at these words, he raised his finger, and, pointing to the east, asked them what they saw. Rhoda and Minna looked up and gazed in silence, for they were unable to describe the grandeur of the scene. It

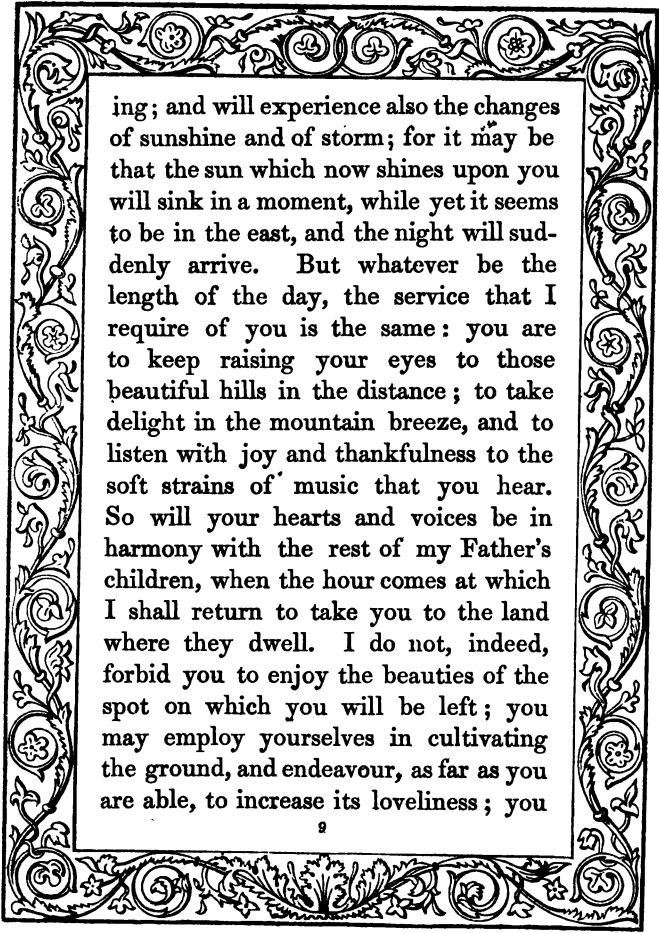


seemed as though there were a vast ocean of hills and mountains, rising majestically one above the other; the sides of them were covered with the brightest flowers and greenest verdure, but the top of them they were unable to see, for a bright and fleecy cloud was resting upon it.

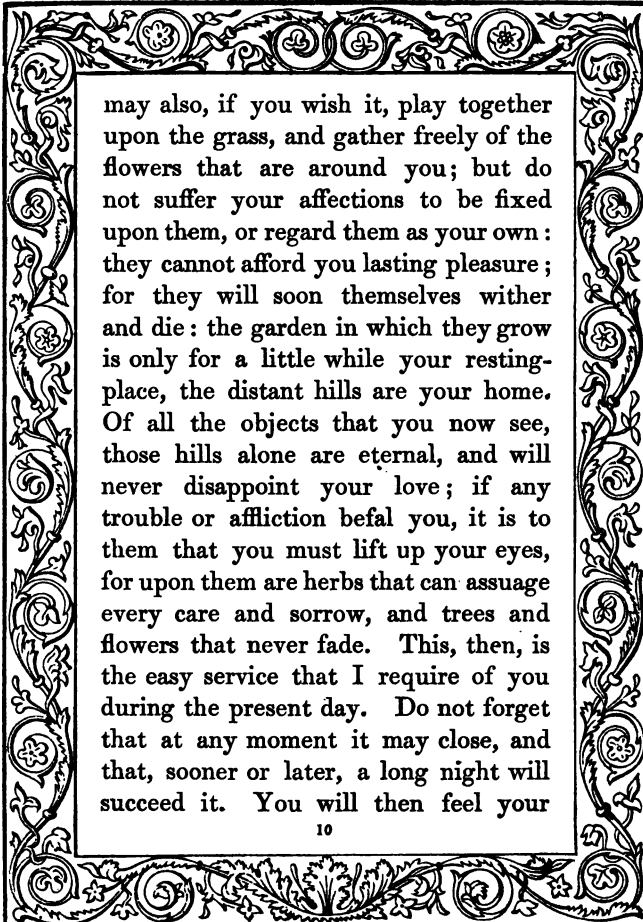
And the stranger said, "Among those glorious mountains my Father has his dwelling-place, and you, from this hour, must learn to look upon them as your home. Thousands and thousands of happy children are living there; they already regard you as members of the same family as themselves, and at this moment, in their morning song, are rejoicing at your deliverance from the dangers of the forest. Listen, and you will hear their voices." Then there arose a soft and gentle breeze; it was fragrant with the flowers that grew upon the mountains, and strains of heavenly music came floating upon it.



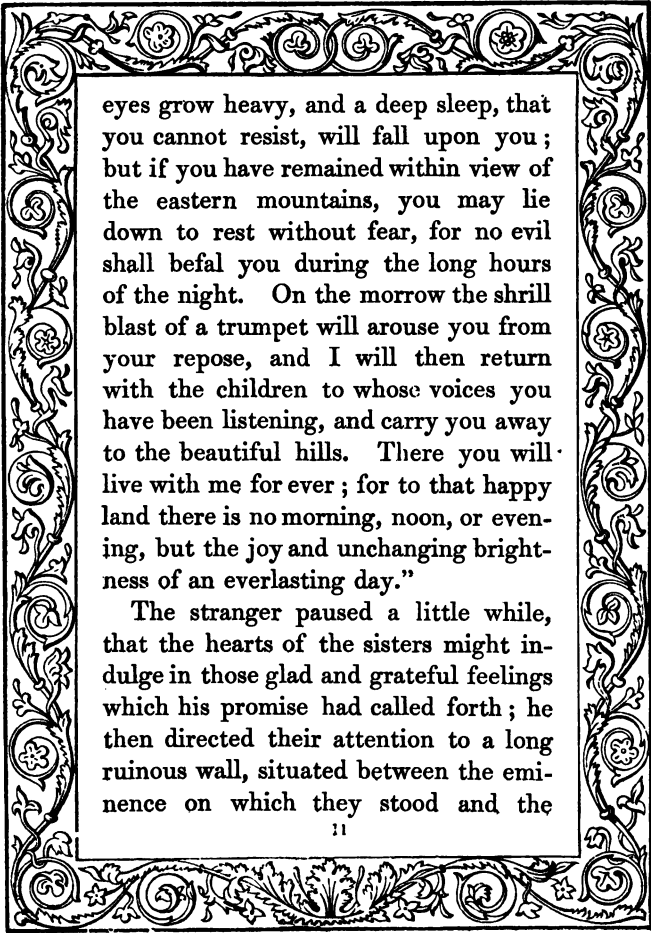
Rhoda and Minna listened in rapture to the sound, and they wondered whether their kind deliverer would bear them at once to those distant hills, and allow them to unite their voices in the song of joy. But he answered their thoughts, and said, "Not yet, my children; I cannot yet suffer you to dwell with the rest of my family in their happy home; you must be content for a little while to think of it, to watch it, to wish for it, and to love it. For one day and one night I shall leave you on the spot where you now are. Here you will have a period of light, and a period of darkness; during the former you must be watchful, during the latter you must rest; but the length of each of them is uncertain. I shall not tell you how many the hours of light, and how many those of darkness will be. It may be that you will be allowed the gradual succession of morning, noon, and even-



ing; and will experience also the changes of sunshine and of storm; for it may be that the sun which now shines upon you will sink in a moment, while yet it seems to be in the east, and the night will suddenly arrive. But whatever be the length of the day, the service that I require of you is the same: you are to keep raising your eyes to those beautiful hills in the distance; to take delight in the mountain breeze, and to listen with joy and thankfulness to the soft strains of music that you hear. So will your hearts and voices be in harmony with the rest of my Father's children, when the hour comes at which I shall return to take you to the land where they dwell. I do not, indeed, forbid you to enjoy the beauties of the spot on which you will be left; you may employ yourselves in cultivating the ground, and endeavour, as far as you are able, to increase its loveliness; you

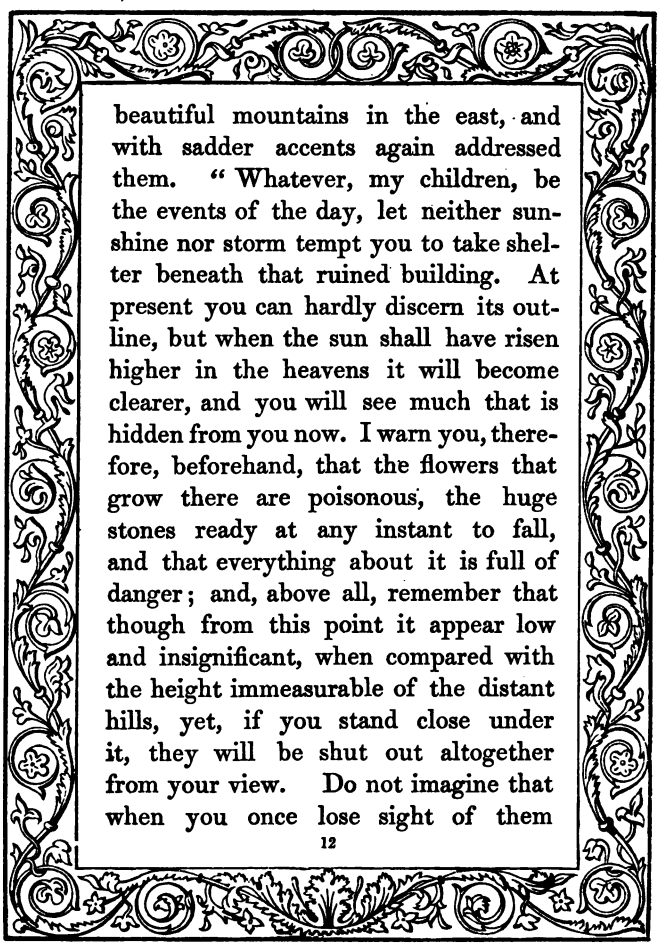


may also, if you wish it, play together upon the grass, and gather freely of the flowers that are around you; but do not suffer your affections to be fixed upon them, or regard them as your own: they cannot afford you lasting pleasure; for they will soon themselves wither and die: the garden in which they grow is only for a little while your resting-place, the distant hills are your home. Of all the objects that you now see, those hills alone are eternal, and will never disappoint your love; if any trouble or affliction befall you, it is to them that you must lift up your eyes, for upon them are herbs that can assuage every care and sorrow, and trees and flowers that never fade. This, then, is the easy service that I require of you during the present day. Do not forget that at any moment it may close, and that, sooner or later, a long night will succeed it. You will then feel your

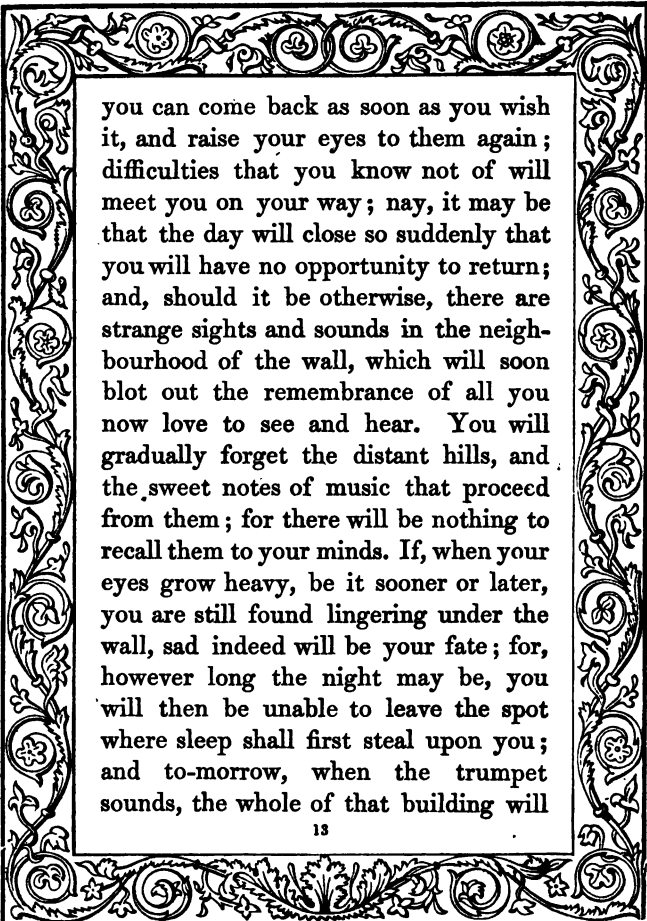


eyes grow heavy, and a deep sleep, that you cannot resist, will fall upon you ; but if you have remained within view of the eastern mountains, you may lie down to rest without fear, for no evil shall befall you during the long hours of the night. On the morrow the shrill blast of a trumpet will arouse you from your repose, and I will then return with the children to whose voices you have been listening, and carry you away to the beautiful hills. There you will live with me for ever ; for to that happy land there is no morning, noon, or evening, but the joy and unchanging brightness of an everlasting day."

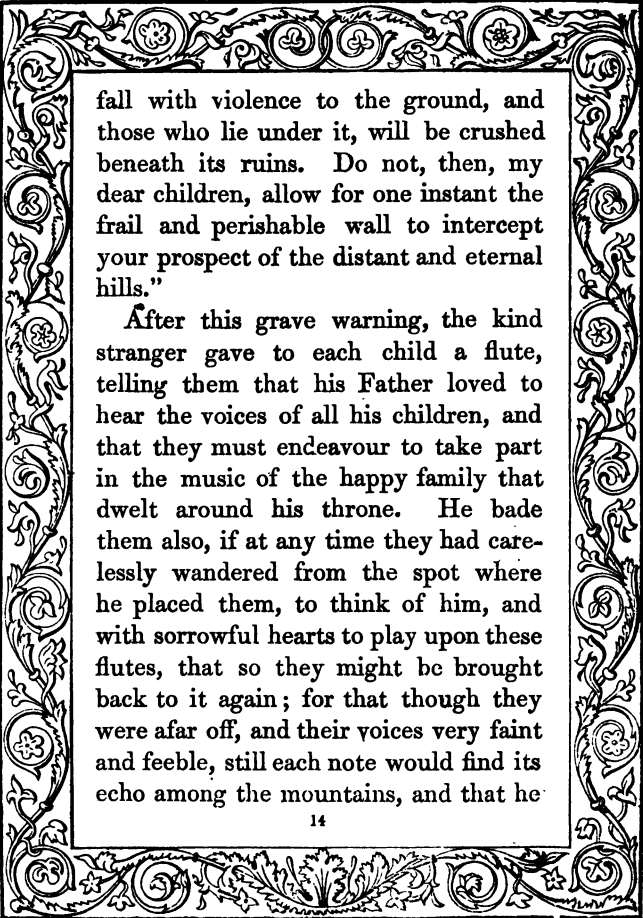
The stranger paused a little while, that the hearts of the sisters might indulge in those glad and grateful feelings which his promise had called forth ; he then directed their attention to a long ruinous wall, situated between the eminence on which they stood and the



beautiful mountains in the east, and with sadder accents again addressed them. "Whatever, my children, be the events of the day, let neither sunshine nor storm tempt you to take shelter beneath that ruined building. At present you can hardly discern its outline, but when the sun shall have risen higher in the heavens it will become clearer, and you will see much that is hidden from you now. I warn you, therefore, beforehand, that the flowers that grow there are poisonous, the huge stones ready at any instant to fall, and that everything about it is full of danger; and, above all, remember that though from this point it appear low and insignificant, when compared with the height immeasurable of the distant hills, yet, if you stand close under it, they will be shut out altogether from your view. Do not imagine that when you once lose sight of them

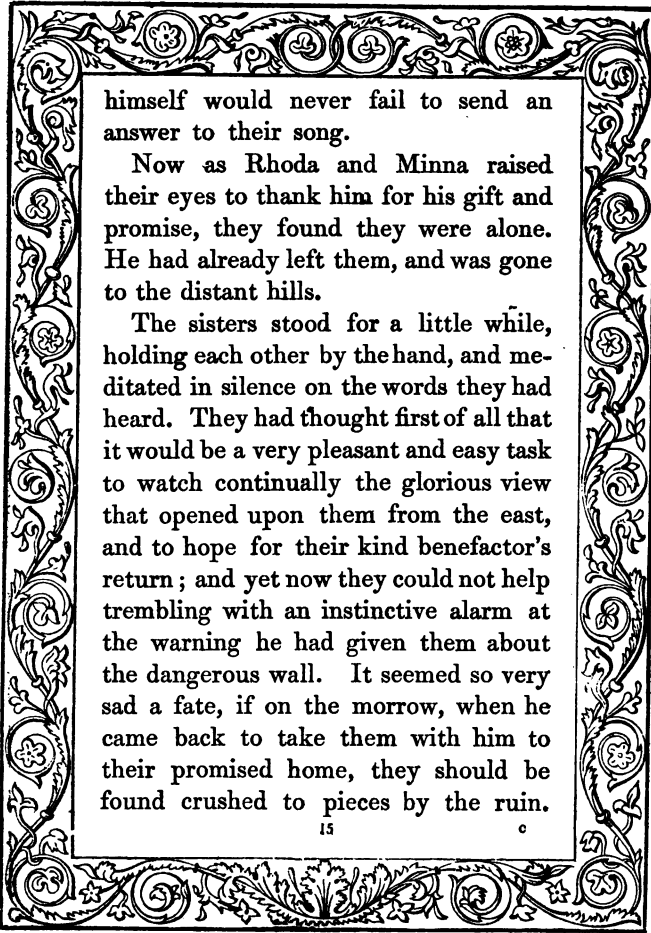


you can come back as soon as you wish it, and raise your eyes to them again ; difficulties that you know not of will meet you on your way ; nay, it may be that the day will close so suddenly that you will have no opportunity to return ; and, should it be otherwise, there are strange sights and sounds in the neighbourhood of the wall, which will soon blot out the remembrance of all you now love to see and hear. You will gradually forget the distant hills, and the sweet notes of music that proceed from them ; for there will be nothing to recall them to your minds. If, when your eyes grow heavy, be it sooner or later, you are still found lingering under the wall, sad indeed will be your fate ; for, however long the night may be, you will then be unable to leave the spot where sleep shall first steal upon you ; and to-morrow, when the trumpet sounds, the whole of that building will



fall with violence to the ground, and those who lie under it, will be crushed beneath its ruins. Do not, then, my dear children, allow for one instant the frail and perishable wall to intercept your prospect of the distant and eternal hills."

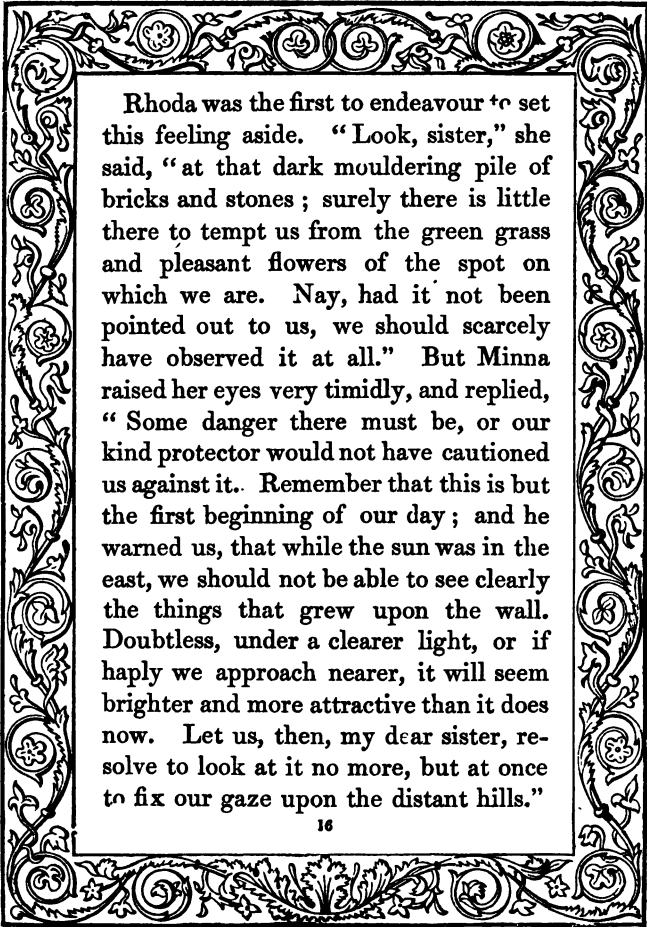
After this grave warning, the kind stranger gave to each child a flute, telling them that his Father loved to hear the voices of all his children, and that they must endeavour to take part in the music of the happy family that dwelt around his throne. He bade them also, if at any time they had carelessly wandered from the spot where he placed them, to think of him, and with sorrowful hearts to play upon these flutes, that so they might be brought back to it again; for that though they were afar off, and their voices very faint and feeble, still each note would find its echo among the mountains, and that he



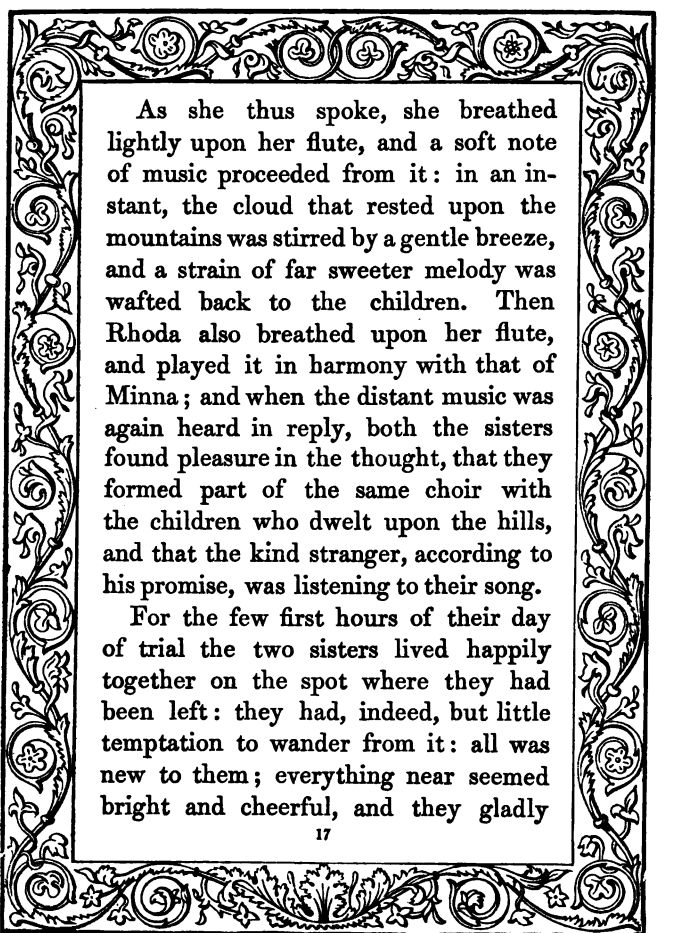
himself would never fail to send an answer to their song.

Now as Rhoda and Minna raised their eyes to thank him for his gift and promise, they found they were alone. He had already left them, and was gone to the distant hills.

The sisters stood for a little while, holding each other by the hand, and meditated in silence on the words they had heard. They had thought first of all that it would be a very pleasant and easy task to watch continually the glorious view that opened upon them from the east, and to hope for their kind benefactor's return; and yet now they could not help trembling with an instinctive alarm at the warning he had given them about the dangerous wall. It seemed so very sad a fate, if on the morrow, when he came back to take them with him to their promised home, they should be found crushed to pieces by the ruin.

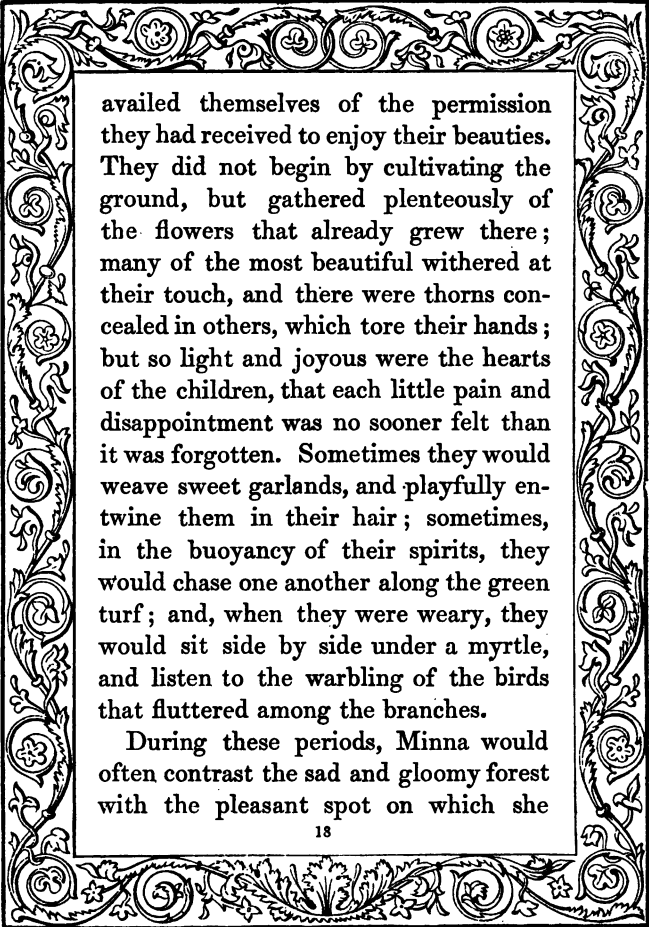


Rhoda was the first to endeavour to set this feeling aside. "Look, sister," she said, "at that dark mouldering pile of bricks and stones ; surely there is little there to tempt us from the green grass and pleasant flowers of the spot on which we are. Nay, had it not been pointed out to us, we should scarcely have observed it at all." But Minna raised her eyes very timidly, and replied, "Some danger there must be, or our kind protector would not have cautioned us against it. Remember that this is but the first beginning of our day ; and he warned us, that while the sun was in the east, we should not be able to see clearly the things that grew upon the wall. Doubtless, under a clearer light, or if haply we approach nearer, it will seem brighter and more attractive than it does now. Let us, then, my dear sister, resolve to look at it no more, but at once to fix our gaze upon the distant hills."



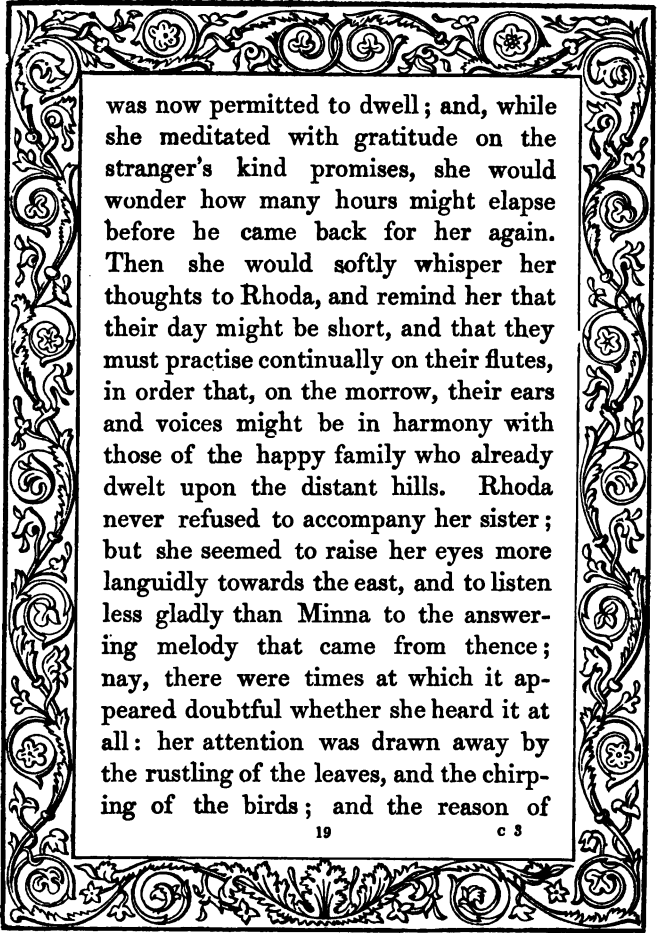
As she thus spoke, she breathed lightly upon her flute, and a soft note of music proceeded from it: in an instant, the cloud that rested upon the mountains was stirred by a gentle breeze, and a strain of far sweeter melody was wafted back to the children. Then Rhoda also breathed upon her flute, and played it in harmony with that of Minna; and when the distant music was again heard in reply, both the sisters found pleasure in the thought, that they formed part of the same choir with the children who dwelt upon the hills, and that the kind stranger, according to his promise, was listening to their song.

For the few first hours of their day of trial the two sisters lived happily together on the spot where they had been left: they had, indeed, but little temptation to wander from it: all was new to them; everything near seemed bright and cheerful, and they gladly

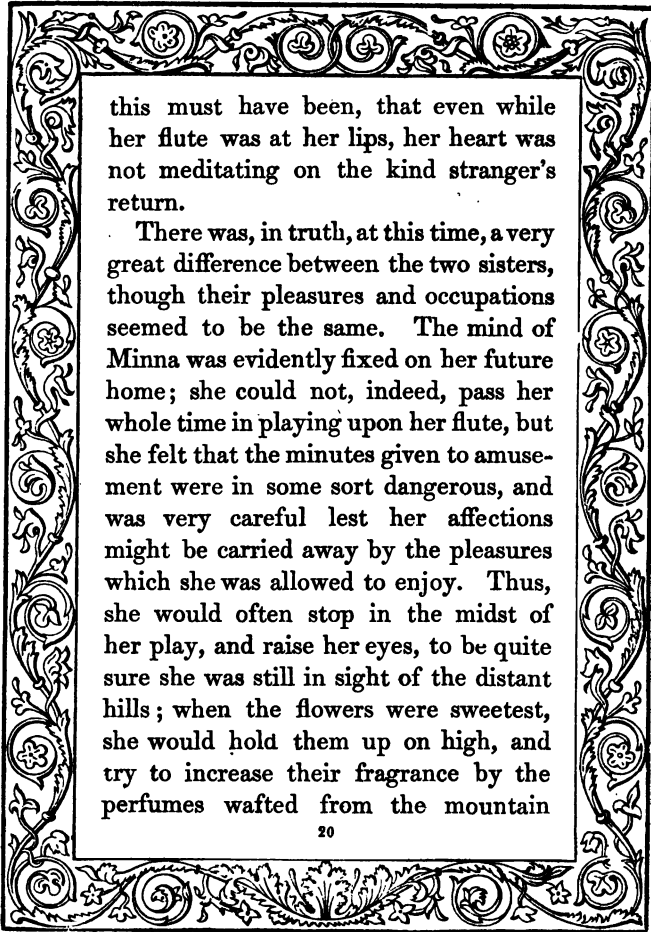


availed themselves of the permission they had received to enjoy their beauties. They did not begin by cultivating the ground, but gathered plenteously of the flowers that already grew there; many of the most beautiful withered at their touch, and there were thorns concealed in others, which tore their hands; but so light and joyous were the hearts of the children, that each little pain and disappointment was no sooner felt than it was forgotten. Sometimes they would weave sweet garlands, and playfully entwine them in their hair; sometimes, in the buoyancy of their spirits, they would chase one another along the green turf; and, when they were weary, they would sit side by side under a myrtle, and listen to the warbling of the birds that fluttered among the branches.

During these periods, Minna would often contrast the sad and gloomy forest with the pleasant spot on which she

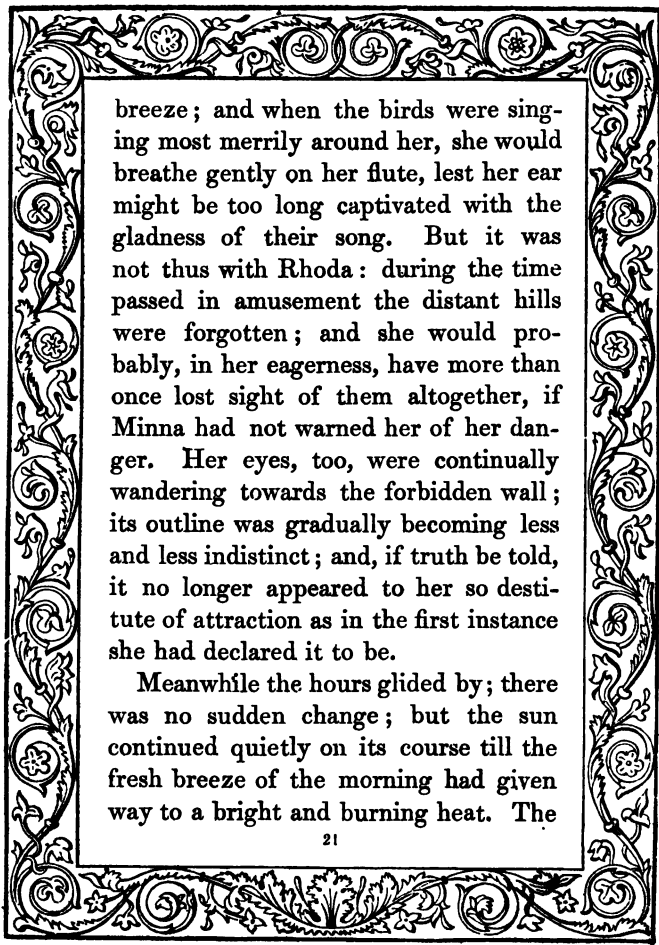


was now permitted to dwell ; and, while she meditated with gratitude on the stranger's kind promises, she would wonder how many hours might elapse before he came back for her again. Then she would softly whisper her thoughts to Rhoda, and remind her that their day might be short, and that they must practise continually on their flutes, in order that, on the morrow, their ears and voices might be in harmony with those of the happy family who already dwelt upon the distant hills. Rhoda never refused to accompany her sister ; but she seemed to raise her eyes more languidly towards the east, and to listen less gladly than Minna to the answering melody that came from thence ; nay, there were times at which it appeared doubtful whether she heard it at all : her attention was drawn away by the rustling of the leaves, and the chirping of the birds ; and the reason of



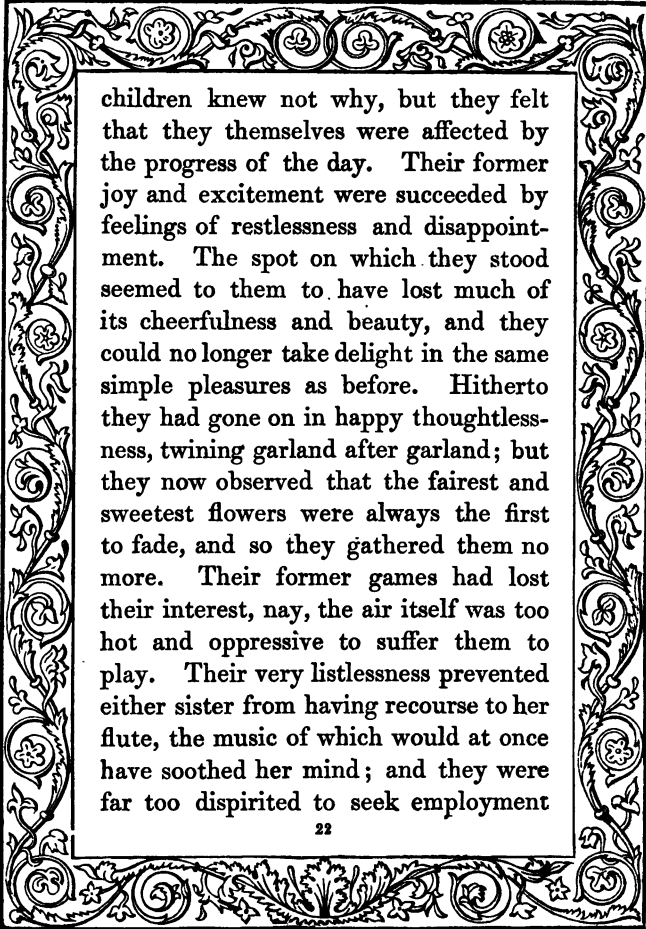
this must have been, that even while her flute was at her lips, her heart was not meditating on the kind stranger's return.

There was, in truth, at this time, a very great difference between the two sisters, though their pleasures and occupations seemed to be the same. The mind of Minna was evidently fixed on her future home; she could not, indeed, pass her whole time in playing upon her flute, but she felt that the minutes given to amusement were in some sort dangerous, and was very careful lest her affections might be carried away by the pleasures which she was allowed to enjoy. Thus, she would often stop in the midst of her play, and raise her eyes, to be quite sure she was still in sight of the distant hills; when the flowers were sweetest, she would hold them up on high, and try to increase their fragrance by the perfumes wafted from the mountain

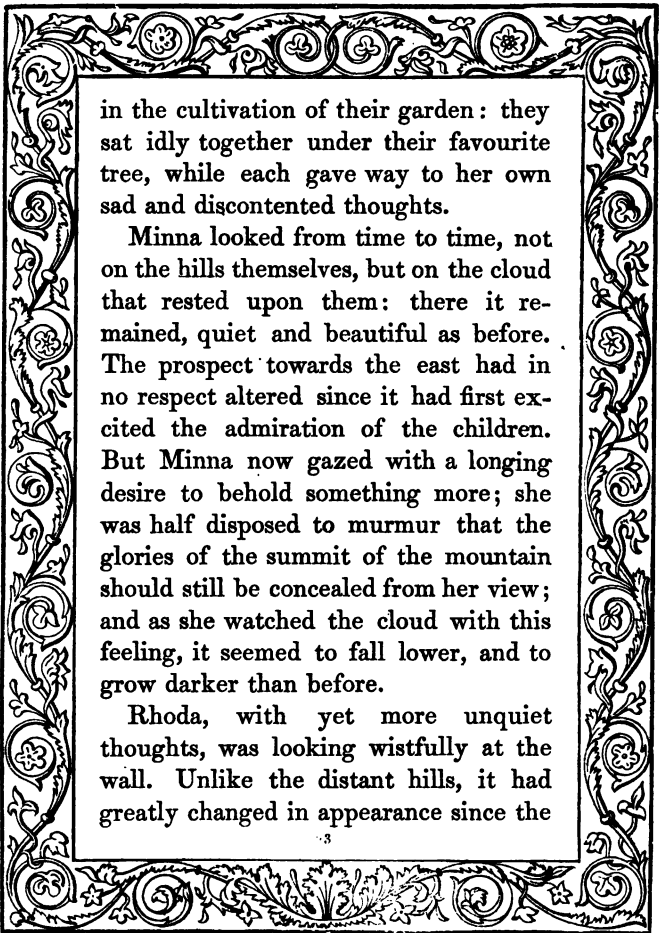


breeze ; and when the birds were singing most merrily around her, she would breathe gently on her flute, lest her ear might be too long captivated with the gladness of their song. But it was not thus with Rhoda : during the time passed in amusement the distant hills were forgotten ; and she would probably, in her eagerness, have more than once lost sight of them altogether, if Minna had not warned her of her danger. Her eyes, too, were continually wandering towards the forbidden wall ; its outline was gradually becoming less and less indistinct ; and, if truth be told, it no longer appeared to her so destitute of attraction as in the first instance she had declared it to be.

Meanwhile the hours glided by ; there was no sudden change ; but the sun continued quietly on its course till the fresh breeze of the morning had given way to a bright and burning heat. The



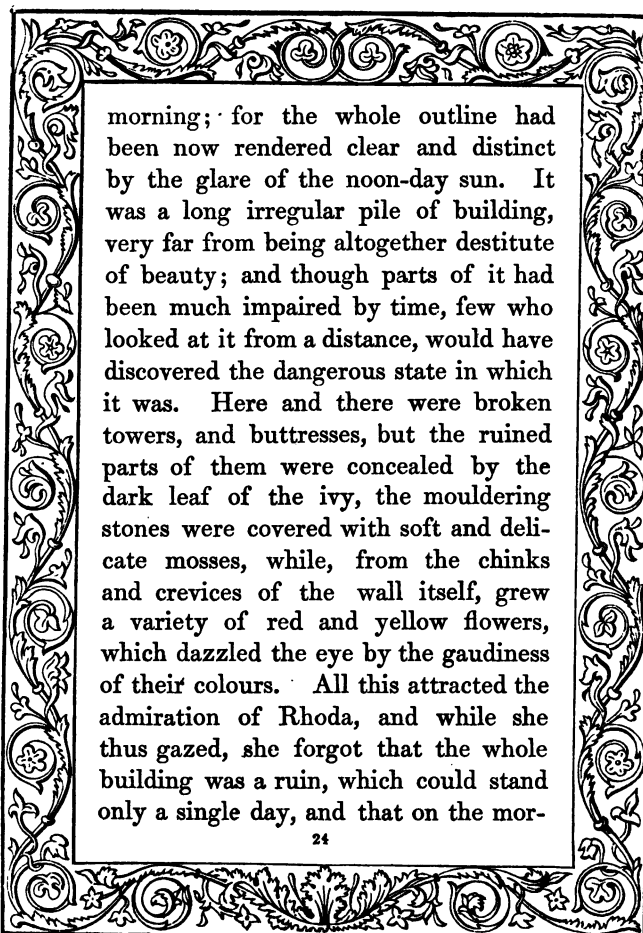
children knew not why, but they felt that they themselves were affected by the progress of the day. Their former joy and excitement were succeeded by feelings of restlessness and disappointment. The spot on which they stood seemed to them to have lost much of its cheerfulness and beauty, and they could no longer take delight in the same simple pleasures as before. Hitherto they had gone on in happy thoughtlessness, twining garland after garland; but they now observed that the fairest and sweetest flowers were always the first to fade, and so they gathered them no more. Their former games had lost their interest, nay, the air itself was too hot and oppressive to suffer them to play. Their very listlessness prevented either sister from having recourse to her flute, the music of which would at once have soothed her mind; and they were far too dispirited to seek employment



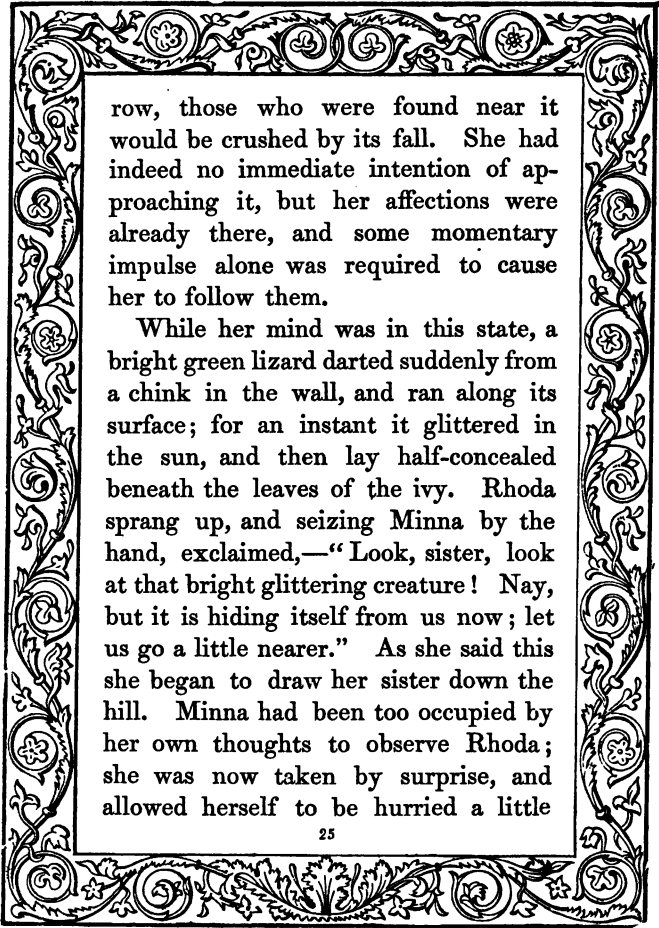
in the cultivation of their garden : they sat idly together under their favourite tree, while each gave way to her own sad and discontented thoughts.

Minna looked from time to time, not on the hills themselves, but on the cloud that rested upon them: there it remained, quiet and beautiful as before. The prospect towards the east had in no respect altered since it had first excited the admiration of the children. But Minna now gazed with a longing desire to behold something more; she was half disposed to murmur that the glories of the summit of the mountain should still be concealed from her view; and as she watched the cloud with this feeling, it seemed to fall lower, and to grow darker than before.

Rhoda, with yet more unquiet thoughts, was looking wistfully at the wall. Unlike the distant hills, it had greatly changed in appearance since the

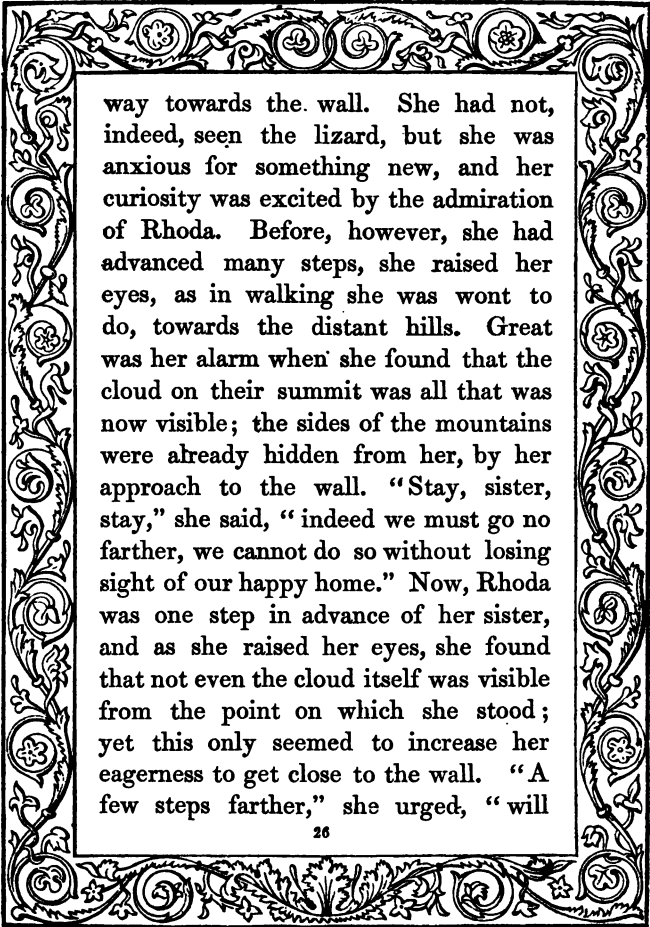


morning; for the whole outline had been now rendered clear and distinct by the glare of the noon-day sun. It was a long irregular pile of building, very far from being altogether destitute of beauty; and though parts of it had been much impaired by time, few who looked at it from a distance, would have discovered the dangerous state in which it was. Here and there were broken towers, and buttresses, but the ruined parts of them were concealed by the dark leaf of the ivy, the mouldering stones were covered with soft and delicate mosses, while, from the chinks and crevices of the wall itself, grew a variety of red and yellow flowers, which dazzled the eye by the gaudiness of their colours. All this attracted the admiration of Rhoda, and while she thus gazed, she forgot that the whole building was a ruin, which could stand only a single day, and that on the mor-

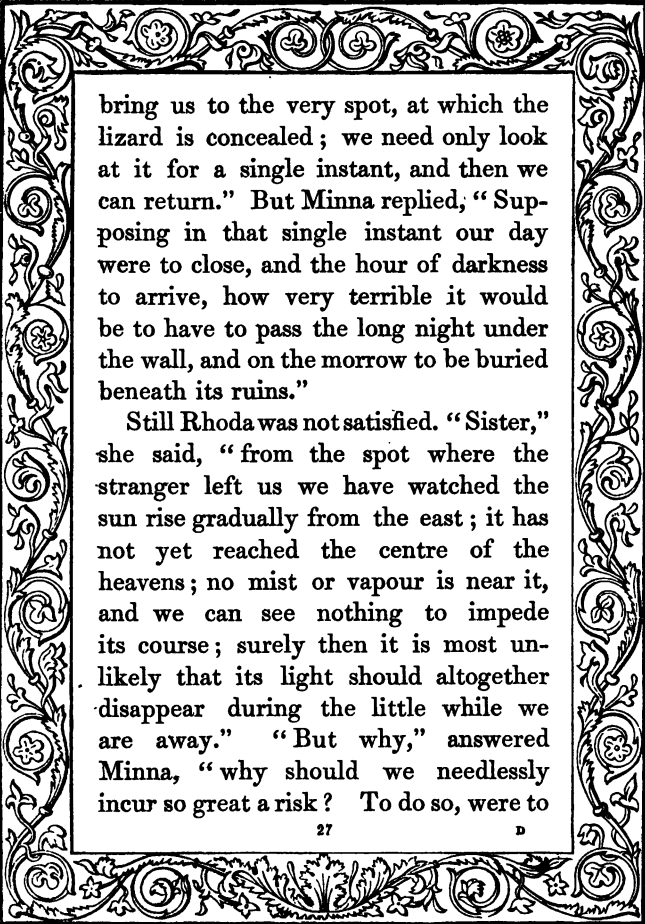


row, those who were found near it would be crushed by its fall. She had indeed no immediate intention of approaching it, but her affections were already there, and some momentary impulse alone was required to cause her to follow them.

While her mind was in this state, a bright green lizard darted suddenly from a chink in the wall, and ran along its surface; for an instant it glittered in the sun, and then lay half-concealed beneath the leaves of the ivy. Rhoda sprang up, and seizing Minna by the hand, exclaimed,—“Look, sister, look at that bright glittering creature! Nay, but it is hiding itself from us now; let us go a little nearer.” As she said this she began to draw her sister down the hill. Minna had been too occupied by her own thoughts to observe Rhoda; she was now taken by surprise, and allowed herself to be hurried a little

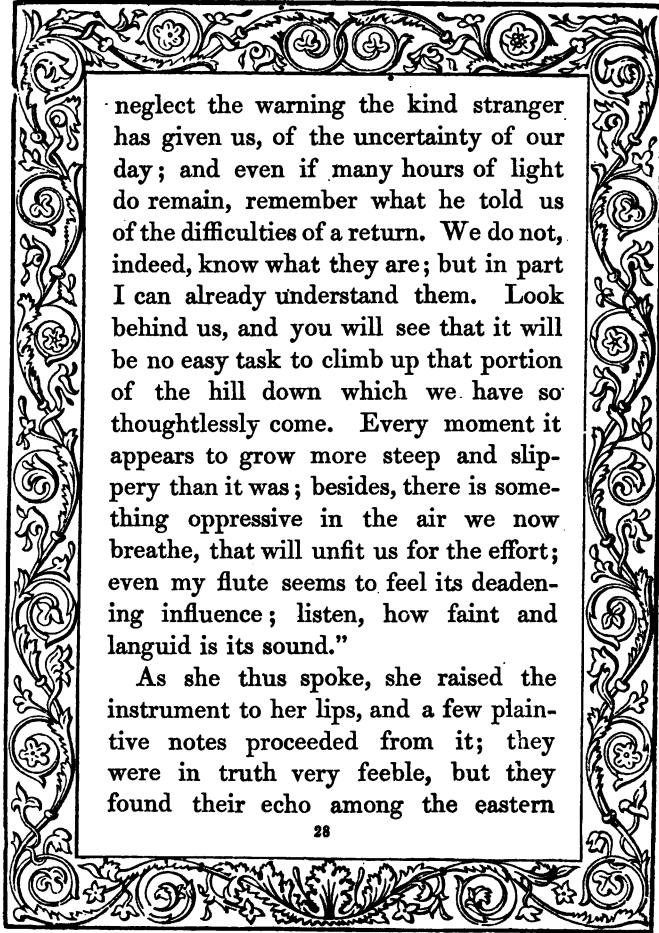


way towards the wall. She had not, indeed, seen the lizard, but she was anxious for something new, and her curiosity was excited by the admiration of Rhoda. Before, however, she had advanced many steps, she raised her eyes, as in walking she was wont to do, towards the distant hills. Great was her alarm when she found that the cloud on their summit was all that was now visible; the sides of the mountains were already hidden from her, by her approach to the wall. "Stay, sister, stay," she said, "indeed we must go no farther, we cannot do so without losing sight of our happy home." Now, Rhoda was one step in advance of her sister, and as she raised her eyes, she found that not even the cloud itself was visible from the point on which she stood; yet this only seemed to increase her eagerness to get close to the wall. "A few steps farther," she urged, "will



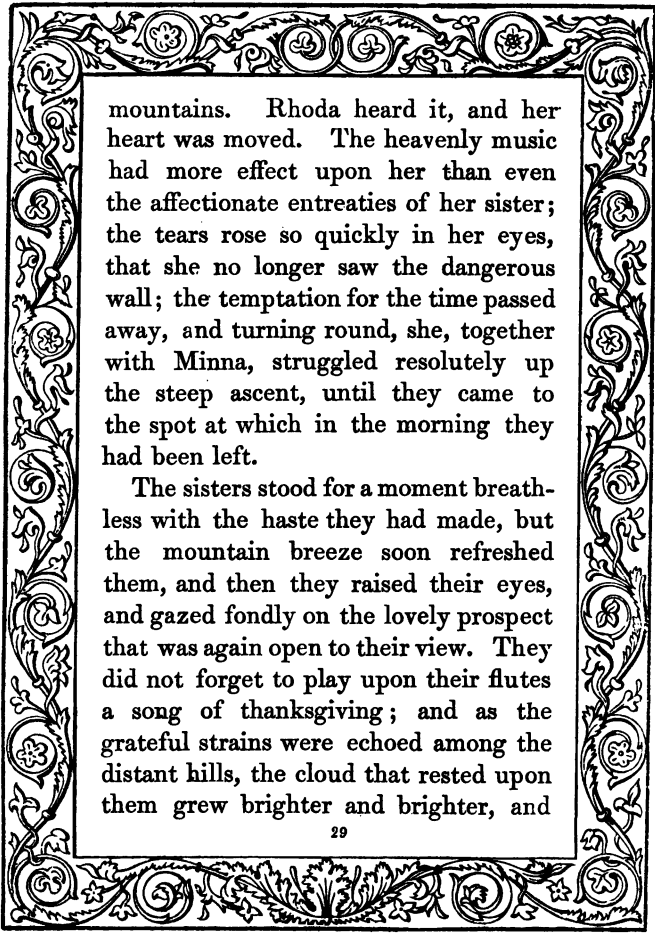
bring us to the very spot, at which the lizard is concealed ; we need only look at it for a single instant, and then we can return." But Minna replied, "Supposing in that single instant our day were to close, and the hour of darkness to arrive, how very terrible it would be to have to pass the long night under the wall, and on the morrow to be buried beneath its ruins."

Still Rhoda was not satisfied. "Sister," she said, "from the spot where the stranger left us we have watched the sun rise gradually from the east ; it has not yet reached the centre of the heavens ; no mist or vapour is near it, and we can see nothing to impede its course ; surely then it is most unlikely that its light should altogether disappear during the little while we are away." "But why," answered Minna, "why should we needlessly incur so great a risk ? To do so, were to



neglect the warning the kind stranger has given us, of the uncertainty of our day; and even if many hours of light do remain, remember what he told us of the difficulties of a return. We do not, indeed, know what they are; but in part I can already understand them. Look behind us, and you will see that it will be no easy task to climb up that portion of the hill down which we have so thoughtlessly come. Every moment it appears to grow more steep and slippery than it was; besides, there is something oppressive in the air we now breathe, that will unfit us for the effort; even my flute seems to feel its deadening influence; listen, how faint and languid is its sound."

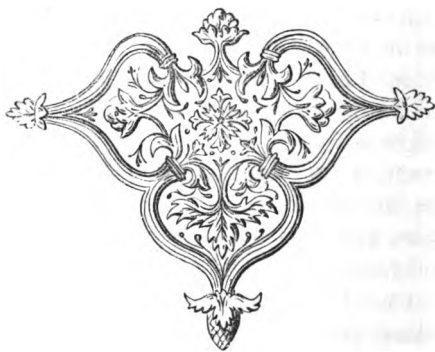
As she thus spoke, she raised the instrument to her lips, and a few plaintive notes proceeded from it; they were in truth very feeble, but they found their echo among the eastern



mountains. Rhoda heard it, and her heart was moved. The heavenly music had more effect upon her than even the affectionate entreaties of her sister; the tears rose so quickly in her eyes, that she no longer saw the dangerous wall; the temptation for the time passed away, and turning round, she, together with Minna, struggled resolutely up the steep ascent, until they came to the spot at which in the morning they had been left.

The sisters stood for a moment breathless with the haste they had made, but the mountain breeze soon refreshed them, and then they raised their eyes, and gazed fondly on the lovely prospect that was again open to their view. They did not forget to play upon their flutes a song of thanksgiving; and as the grateful strains were echoed among the distant hills, the cloud that rested upon them grew brighter and brighter, and

there was a strain of gladness in the answering melody, as though the happy family that dwelt there were rejoicing at their return.



Questions on Chapter I.

Q. WHAT is signified by the condition of the children who were benighted in the forest?

A. The natural state of man, which is rendered dark and miserable by original sin.

Q. Who was the stranger that delivered them from the dangers to which they were exposed?

A. Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Q. Why is it said, that when He found them they were unable to speak or move?

A. Because we have no power to pray to Christ, or to rise and follow Him, without His special grace.

Q. What is meant by the river, at the boundary of the wood ?

A. The waters of Holy Baptism, through which Jesus Christ vouchsafes, as it were, to carry us in His arms from the state of nature to the state of grace.

Q. What other effect had the waters upon the children, besides washing away the stains from their garments ?

A. It removed their weariness, and gave them new vigour and strength.

Q. In the same way also, Holy Baptism not only purifies us from past sins, but endues us with the strength of the Holy Spirit, to enable us to walk in newness of life. Why did the stranger tell them that they were now the adopted children of his Father ?

A. Because by Baptism we are made members of Christ, and children of God.

Q. And what were those distant

hills in the east, that He then pointed out to them?

A. Their inheritance in heaven.

Q. Who were the happy family that already dwelt there?

A. The holy angels.

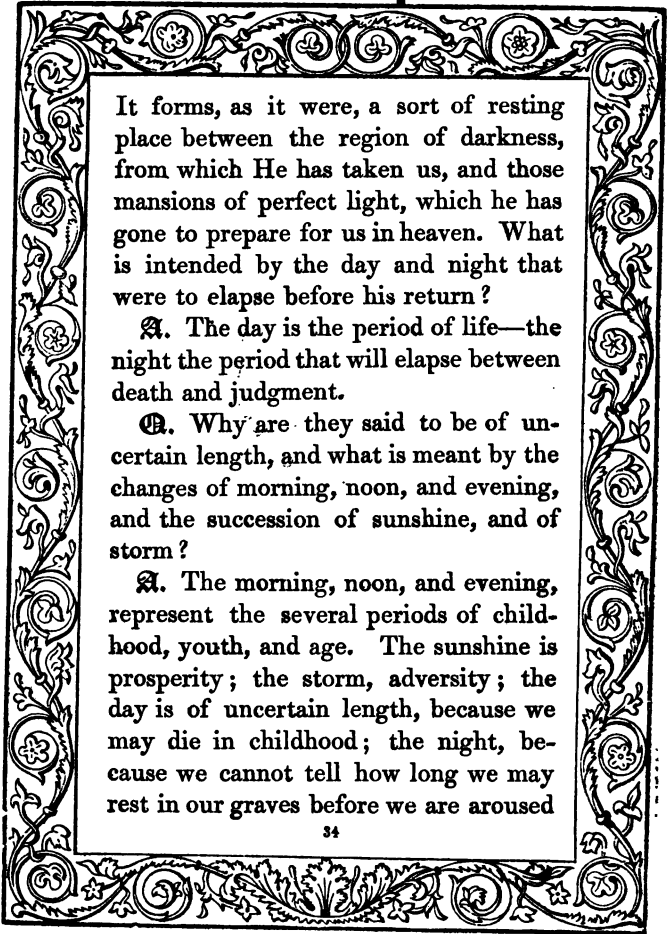
Q. Why is it said that a cloud covered the top of the mountains?

A. Because we cannot understand the joys of heaven.

Q. Yes; though much has been revealed to us by our Saviour, there is still very much that we cannot yet realize in that blessed state for which we are preparing. We must still be content to see in part, and know in part, and exercise the virtues of faith and hope. What is signified by the place in which the stranger left the children?

A. The church upon earth.

Q. It is there that our Saviour leaves those who by Baptism He has admitted to his kingdom, to wait for His return.



It forms, as it were, a sort of resting place between the region of darkness, from which He has taken us, and those mansions of perfect light, which he has gone to prepare for us in heaven. What is intended by the day and night that were to elapse before his return?

A. The day is the period of life—the night the period that will elapse between death and judgment.

Q. Why are they said to be of uncertain length, and what is meant by the changes of morning, noon, and evening, and the succession of sunshine, and of storm?

A. The morning, noon, and evening, represent the several periods of childhood, youth, and age. The sunshine is prosperity; the storm, adversity; the day is of uncertain length, because we may die in childhood; the night, because we cannot tell how long we may rest in our graves before we are aroused

from our sleep by the second advent of our Saviour.

Q. What was to be the employment of the children while the day continued?

A. They were to remain on the spot where they were left, and to gaze constantly on the distant hills, and learn to love them more and more.

Q. What duty of Christians is this designed to teach us?

A. That while we are upon earth we must set our affections on things above, and so endeavour to prepare ourselves for heaven.

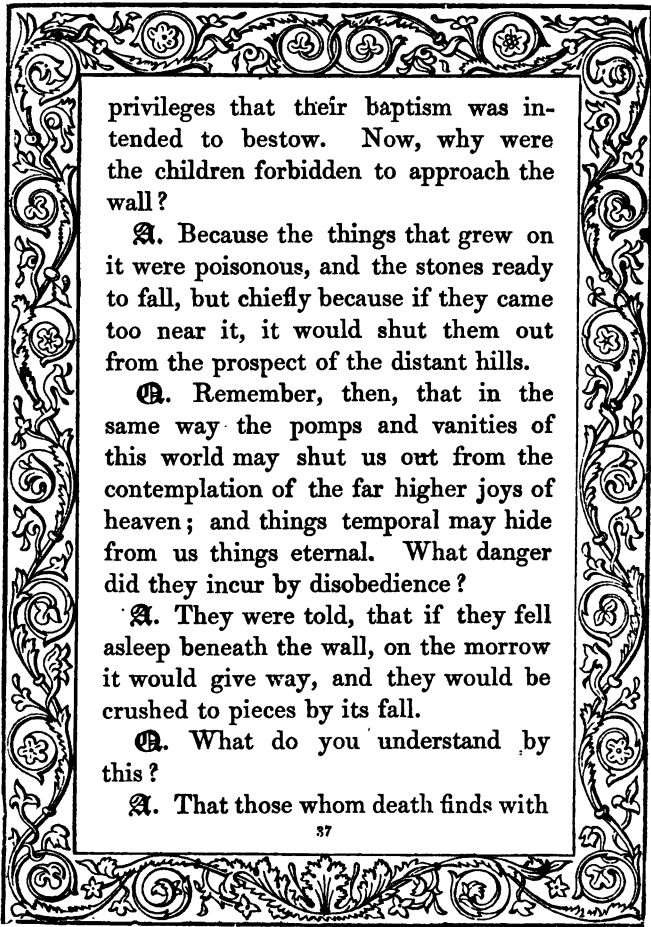
Q. What is meant by the ground the children were to cultivate, and the flowers they were allowed to gather?

A. The occupations and pleasures which it has pleased God to give us in this life, and which only become dangerous when we so dwell upon them, that they draw away our minds from thoughts of our Saviour.

Q. What is signified by the ruined wall?

A. The world.

Q. Yes, in that sense in which St. John speaks of it, when he tells us that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And it is possible for those who are placed in the Church to live notwithstanding as children of the world; for we must remember that the Church upon earth does not secure us against temptations to evil; otherwise our Lord would not have compared it to a field in which the tares and wheat were growing together, and a net in which good and bad fish were found. There is a world within it, and though Christians having been once baptized cannot again cross the stream, and return to the forest beyond, yet, by seeking that world, and by a neglect of the Gospel promises, they may forfeit all those



privileges that their baptism was intended to bestow. Now, why were the children forbidden to approach the wall?

A. Because the things that grew on it were poisonous, and the stones ready to fall, but chiefly because if they came too near it, it would shut them out from the prospect of the distant hills.

Q. Remember, then, that in the same way the pomps and vanities of this world may shut us out from the contemplation of the far higher joys of heaven; and things temporal may hide from us things eternal. What danger did they incur by disobedience?

A. They were told, that if they fell asleep beneath the wall, on the morrow it would give way, and they would be crushed to pieces by its fall.

Q. What do you understand by this?

A. That those whom death finds with

their affections set upon the world, will perish everlastingly in the day of judgment, when the world and the lust thereof shall pass away.

Q. What is signified by the flutes that were left with the children ?

A. The gift of prayer, and other means of holding communion with God.

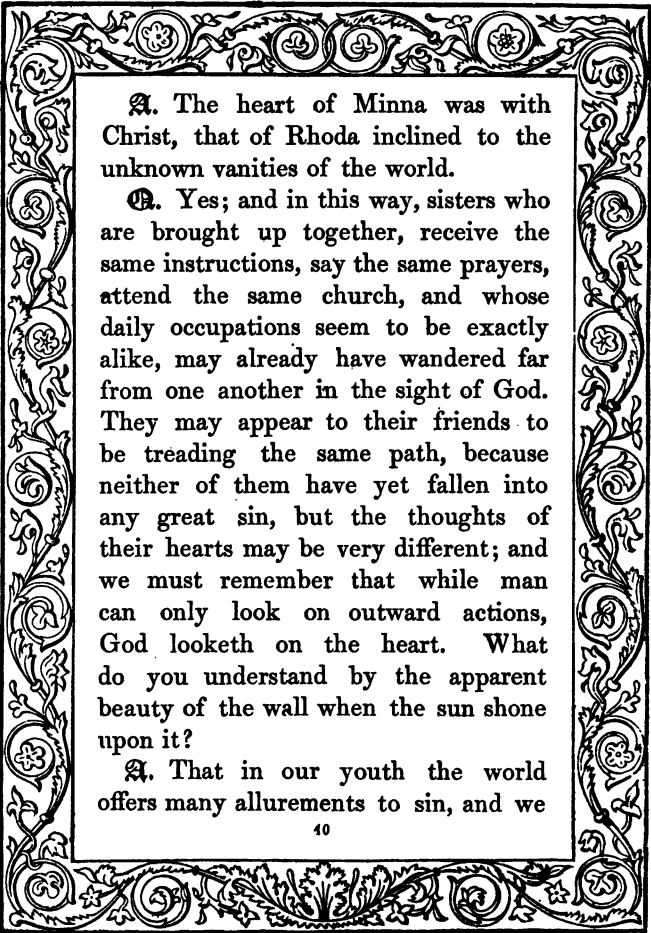
Q. Yes, and for these great blessings we are indebted to our Saviour. It is He who thus enables Christians upon earth to share the high privilege of the holy angels in heaven ; and to prepare themselves for that employment which will hereafter be their chief delight, when they are admitted to the presence of God. By the answering echo among the distant mountains, we are to understand that spiritual joy and comfort which sincere and earnest prayer never fails to afford us. Why is it said that the outline of the wall was indistinct during the morning ?

A. Is it because during our infancy and childhood we cannot clearly see the dangers of the world?

A. We not only cannot see its dangers, but we cannot even understand the nature of many of its temptations. God hides, as it were, from little children much that is impure and evil, while he opens to them at once the prospect of heaven. He gives them their early years to devote themselves to his service, and to prepare for trials to which they will afterwards be exposed. What do you understand by the description of the way in which Rhoda and Minna passed the morning?

A. They were allowed to enjoy quietly the pleasures of childhood, and neither of them neglected the outward exercises of religion.

A. So far they were both alike. What was the real difference between them?



A. The heart of Minna was with Christ, that of Rhoda inclined to the unknown vanities of the world.

Q. Yes; and in this way, sisters who are brought up together, receive the same instructions, say the same prayers, attend the same church, and whose daily occupations seem to be exactly alike, may already have wandered far from one another in the sight of God. They may appear to their friends to be treading the same path, because neither of them have yet fallen into any great sin, but the thoughts of their hearts may be very different; and we must remember that while man can only look on outward actions, God looketh on the heart. What do you understand by the apparent beauty of the wall when the sun shone upon it?

A. That in our youth the world offers many allurements to sin, and we

cannot see the mischief that lurks beneath them.

Q. What is meant by the appearance of the lizard?

A. A sudden temptation to a worldly pleasure, to which in her youth Rhoda became exposed.

Q. And she yielded to it at once, without inquiring whether it were sinful, because her heart was already set upon the world. But why did Minna begin to follow her?

A. Because, although she was not, like her sister, coveting the forbidden pleasures of this life, she was dissatisfied with her indistinct perception of the joys of Heaven.

Q. This is signified by her complaint that the cloud still concealed the top of the mountains. Why is it said that, as she watched it with this feeling, it grew darker and sunk lower than before?

A. It means that she knew less instead of more of heavenly things.

R. Yes. When we murmur because we cannot see more than God has vouchsafed to reveal to us, we only darken our own understanding. How was Minna saved from approaching the wall?

A. She observed that it was gradually hiding the beautiful mountains from her view.

R. Yes; and she observed this in consequence of her habit of raising her eyes towards the East. The best of us are liable to err. They alone are safe whose thoughts are so habitually directed heavenward, that they discover at once when they are about to lose sight of their promised home. How do you understand the arguments by which Minna tried to persuade Rhoda to hasten back to the spot where they had been left?

A. She reminded her that the day might close suddenly, meaning that, though they were young and healthy, death might at any moment take them by surprise, and that after death it would be impossible for them to recover the bright prospect which they had lost.

Q. Why did she say that the hill was increasing in steepness behind them?

A. Because the return to virtue becomes more and more laborious the longer we defer it.

Q. You know what is meant by her playing upon her flute?

A. That she offered a sincere and earnest prayer for herself and her sister, which God in his mercy heard and answered.

Q. What do you understand by the tears of Rhoda preventing her seeing any longer the dangerous wall?

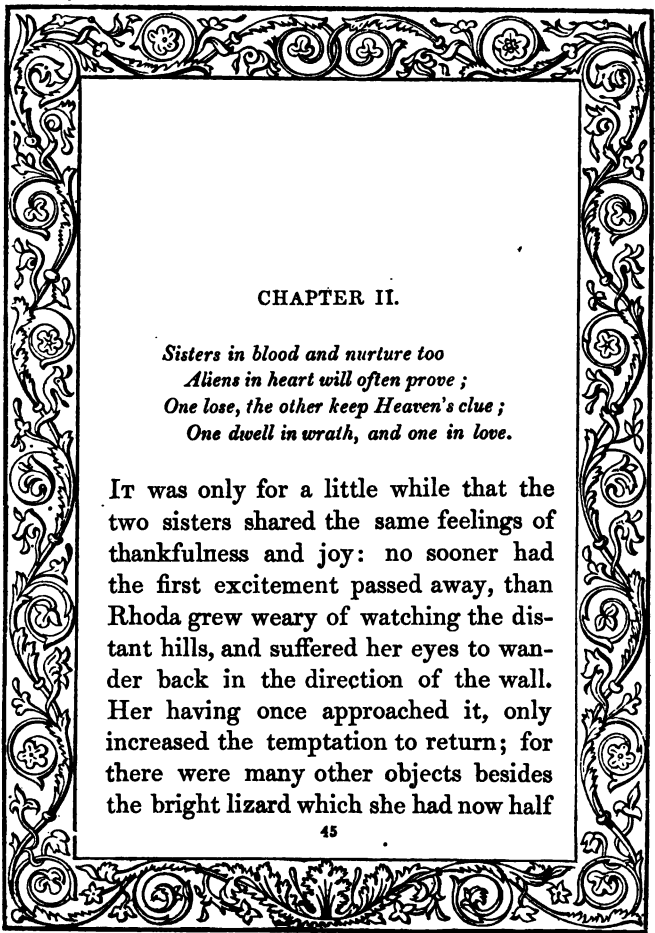
A. Sorrow for her past transgression

removed for a time the temptation to further sin.

Q. Why is it said that, when the children had returned from their wandering, there were strains of unusual gladness in the music of the distant hills?

A. Because we are told that there is joy in heaven in the presence of the angels of God over the penitent sinner.

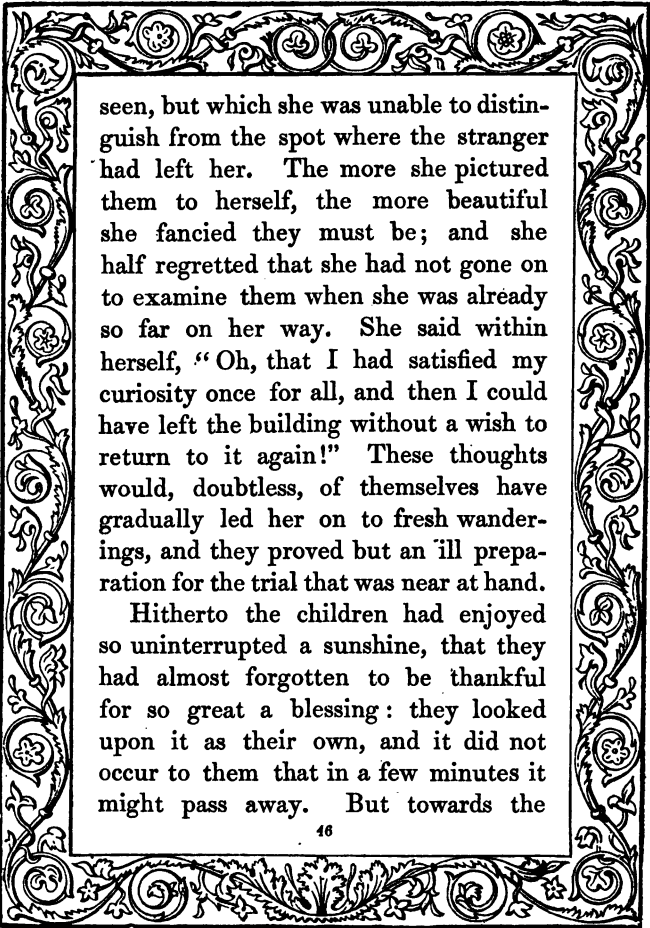




CHAPTER II.

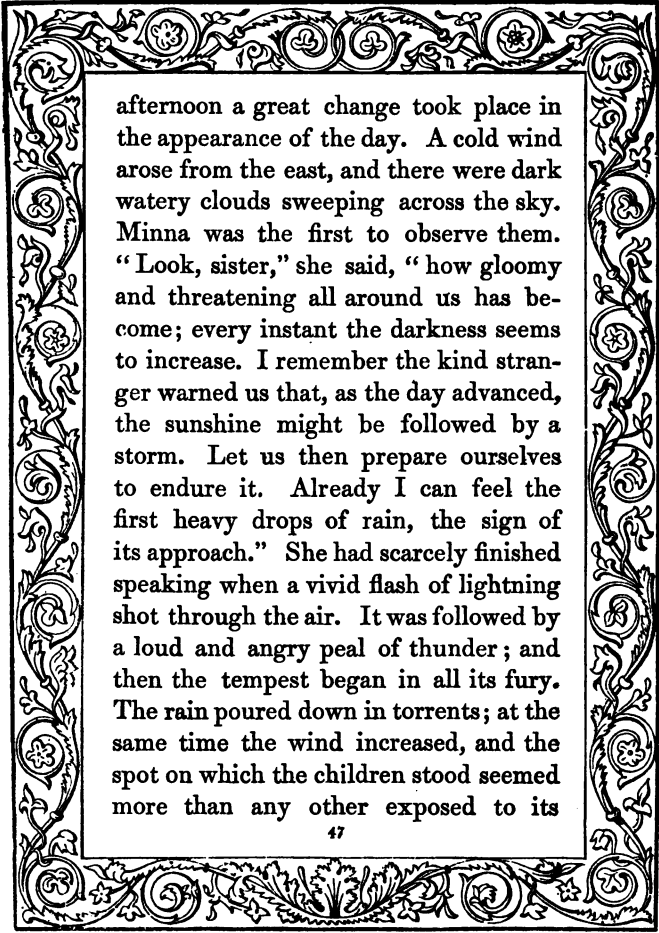
*Sisters in blood and nurture too
Aliens in heart will often prove ;
One lose, the other keep Heaven's clue ;
One dwell in wrath, and one in love.*

It was only for a little while that the two sisters shared the same feelings of thankfulness and joy: no sooner had the first excitement passed away, than Rhoda grew weary of watching the distant hills, and suffered her eyes to wander back in the direction of the wall. Her having once approached it, only increased the temptation to return; for there were many other objects besides the bright lizard which she had now half

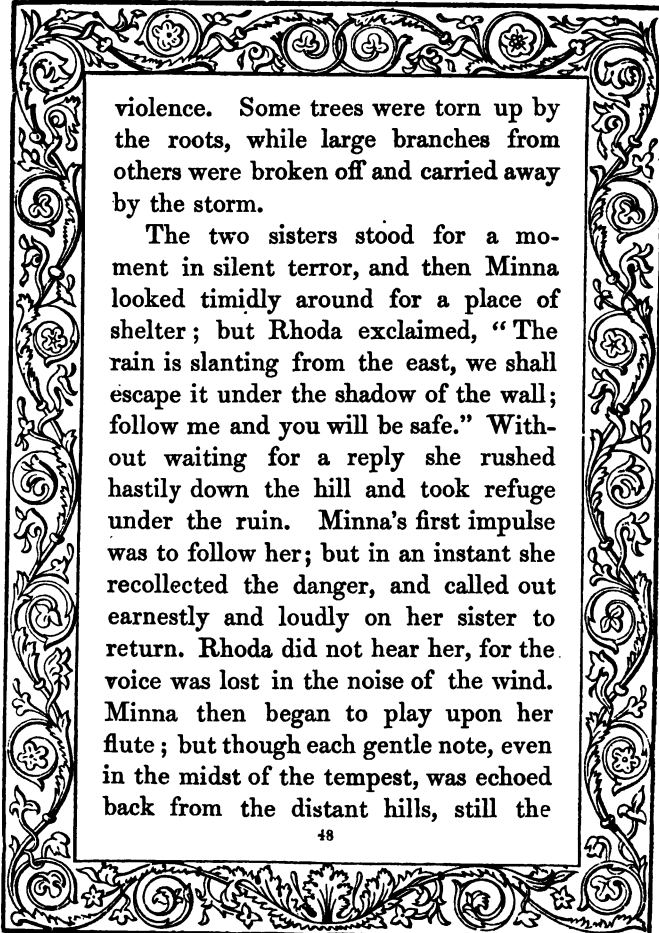


seen, but which she was unable to distinguish from the spot where the stranger had left her. The more she pictured them to herself, the more beautiful she fancied they must be; and she half regretted that she had not gone on to examine them when she was already so far on her way. She said within herself, "Oh, that I had satisfied my curiosity once for all, and then I could have left the building without a wish to return to it again!" These thoughts would, doubtless, of themselves have gradually led her on to fresh wanderings, and they proved but an ill preparation for the trial that was near at hand.

Hitherto the children had enjoyed so uninterrupted a sunshine, that they had almost forgotten to be thankful for so great a blessing: they looked upon it as their own, and it did not occur to them that in a few minutes it might pass away. But towards the

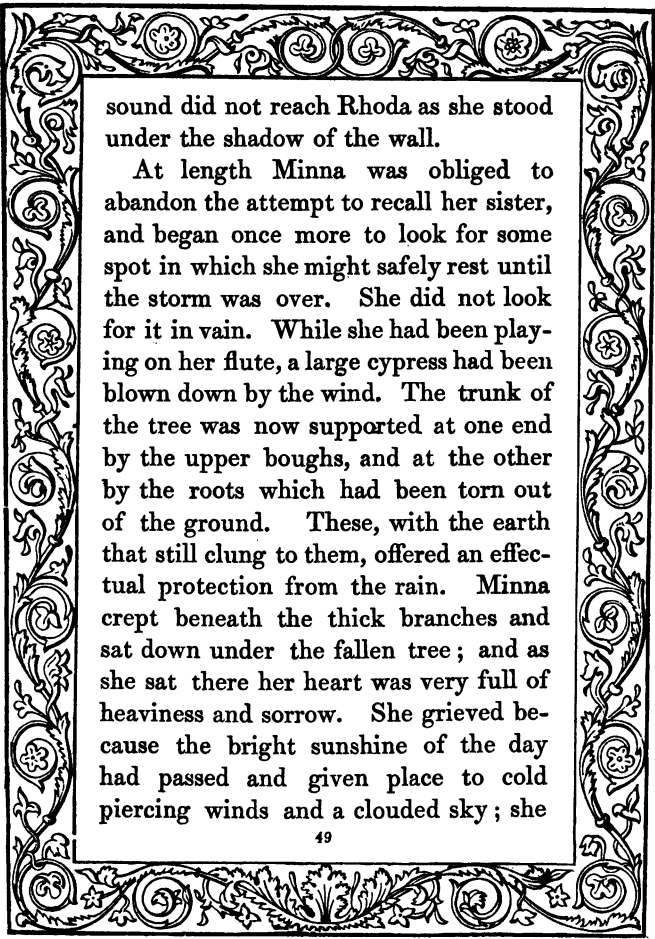


afternoon a great change took place in the appearance of the day. A cold wind arose from the east, and there were dark watery clouds sweeping across the sky. Minna was the first to observe them. "Look, sister," she said, "how gloomy and threatening all around us has become; every instant the darkness seems to increase. I remember the kind stranger warned us that, as the day advanced, the sunshine might be followed by a storm. Let us then prepare ourselves to endure it. Already I can feel the first heavy drops of rain, the sign of its approach." She had scarcely finished speaking when a vivid flash of lightning shot through the air. It was followed by a loud and angry peal of thunder; and then the tempest began in all its fury. The rain poured down in torrents; at the same time the wind increased, and the spot on which the children stood seemed more than any other exposed to its



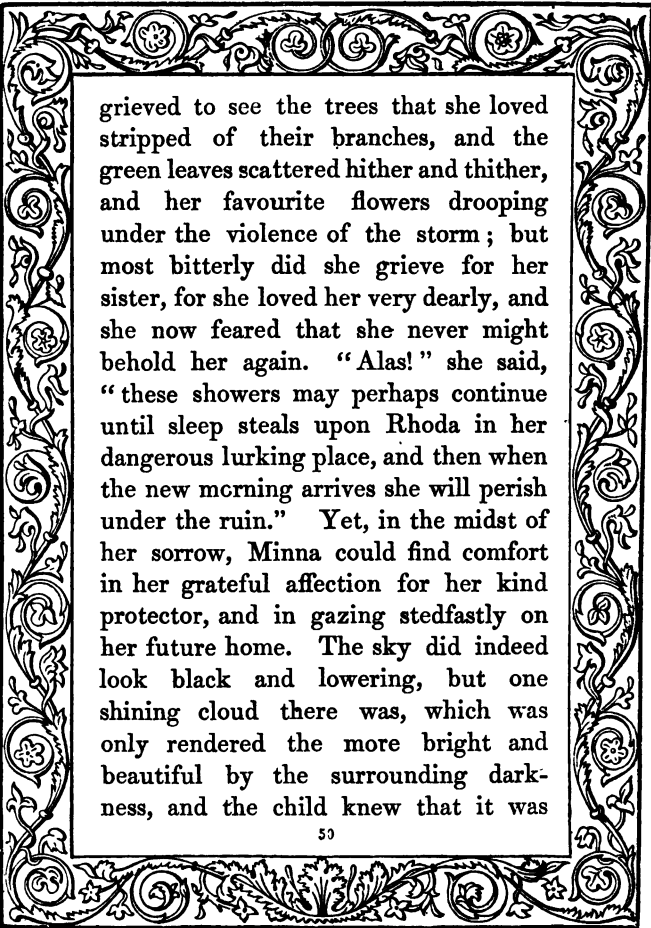
violence. Some trees were torn up by the roots, while large branches from others were broken off and carried away by the storm.

The two sisters stood for a moment in silent terror, and then Minna looked timidly around for a place of shelter; but Rhoda exclaimed, "The rain is slanting from the east, we shall escape it under the shadow of the wall; follow me and you will be safe." Without waiting for a reply she rushed hastily down the hill and took refuge under the ruin. Minna's first impulse was to follow her; but in an instant she recollected the danger, and called out earnestly and loudly on her sister to return. Rhoda did not hear her, for the voice was lost in the noise of the wind. Minna then began to play upon her flute; but though each gentle note, even in the midst of the tempest, was echoed back from the distant hills, still the

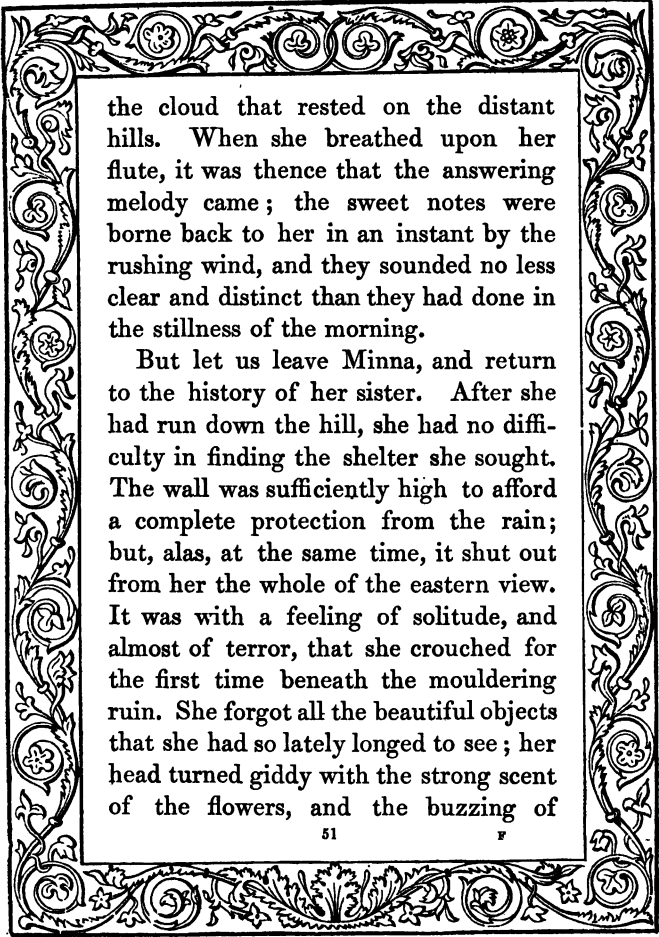


sound did not reach Rhoda as she stood under the shadow of the wall.

At length Minna was obliged to abandon the attempt to recall her sister, and began once more to look for some spot in which she might safely rest until the storm was over. She did not look for it in vain. While she had been playing on her flute, a large cypress had been blown down by the wind. The trunk of the tree was now supported at one end by the upper boughs, and at the other by the roots which had been torn out of the ground. These, with the earth that still clung to them, offered an effectual protection from the rain. Minna crept beneath the thick branches and sat down under the fallen tree; and as she sat there her heart was very full of heaviness and sorrow. She grieved because the bright sunshine of the day had passed and given place to cold piercing winds and a clouded sky; she

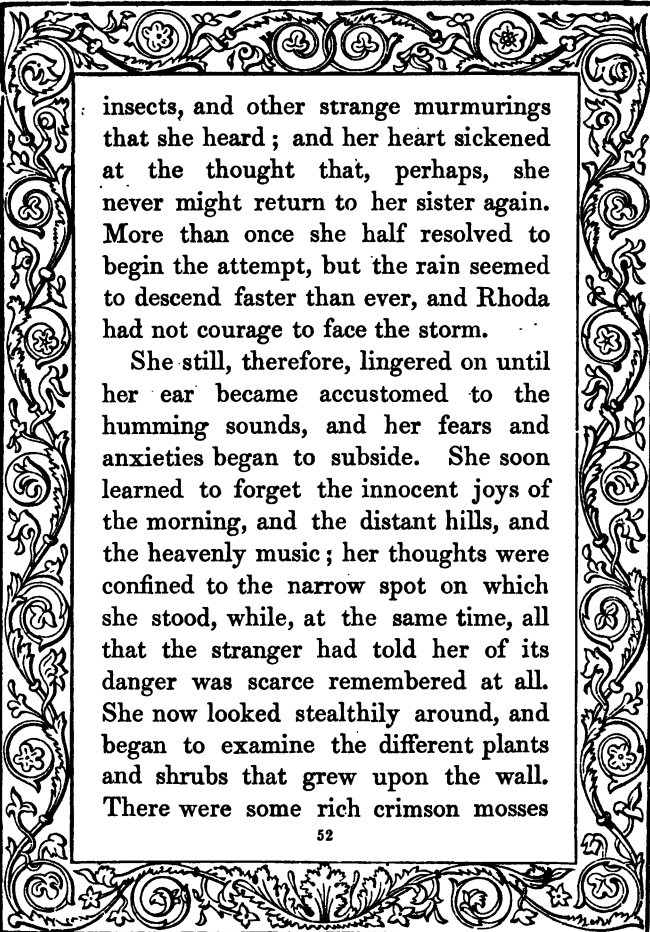


grieved to see the trees that she loved stripped of their branches, and the green leaves scattered hither and thither, and her favourite flowers drooping under the violence of the storm ; but most bitterly did she grieve for her sister, for she loved her very dearly, and she now feared that she never might behold her again. "Alas!" she said, "these showers may perhaps continue until sleep steals upon Rhoda in her dangerous lurking place, and then when the new morning arrives she will perish under the ruin." Yet, in the midst of her sorrow, Minna could find comfort in her grateful affection for her kind protector, and in gazing stedfastly on her future home. The sky did indeed look black and lowering, but one shining cloud there was, which was only rendered the more bright and beautiful by the surrounding darkness, and the child knew that it was



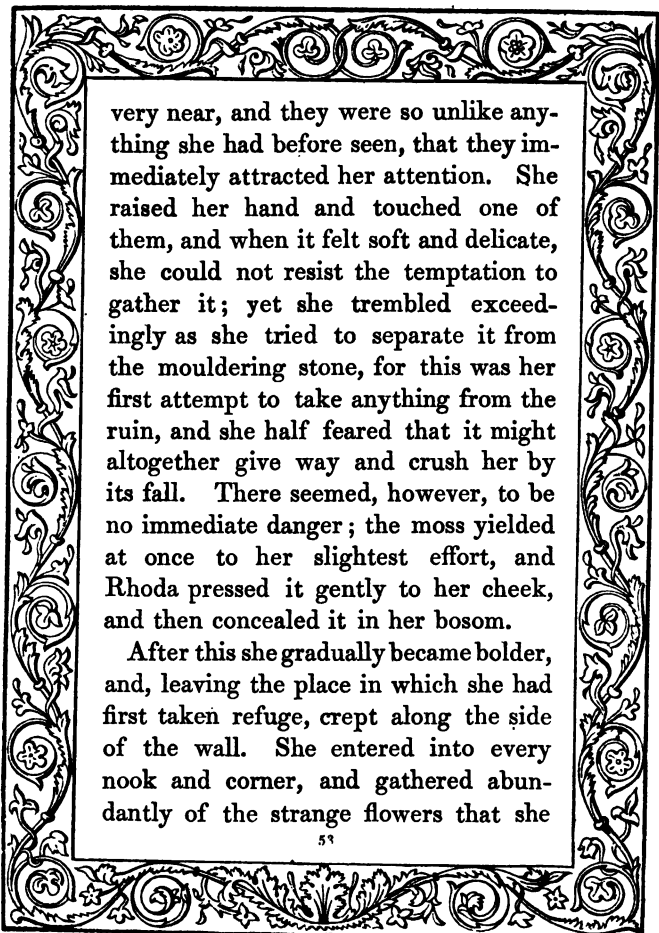
the cloud that rested on the distant hills. When she breathed upon her flute, it was thence that the answering melody came ; the sweet notes were borne back to her in an instant by the rushing wind, and they sounded no less clear and distinct than they had done in the stillness of the morning.

But let us leave Minna, and return to the history of her sister. After she had run down the hill, she had no difficulty in finding the shelter she sought. The wall was sufficiently high to afford a complete protection from the rain ; but, alas, at the same time, it shut out from her the whole of the eastern view. It was with a feeling of solitude, and almost of terror, that she crouched for the first time beneath the mouldering ruin. She forgot all the beautiful objects that she had so lately longed to see ; her head turned giddy with the strong scent of the flowers, and the buzzing of



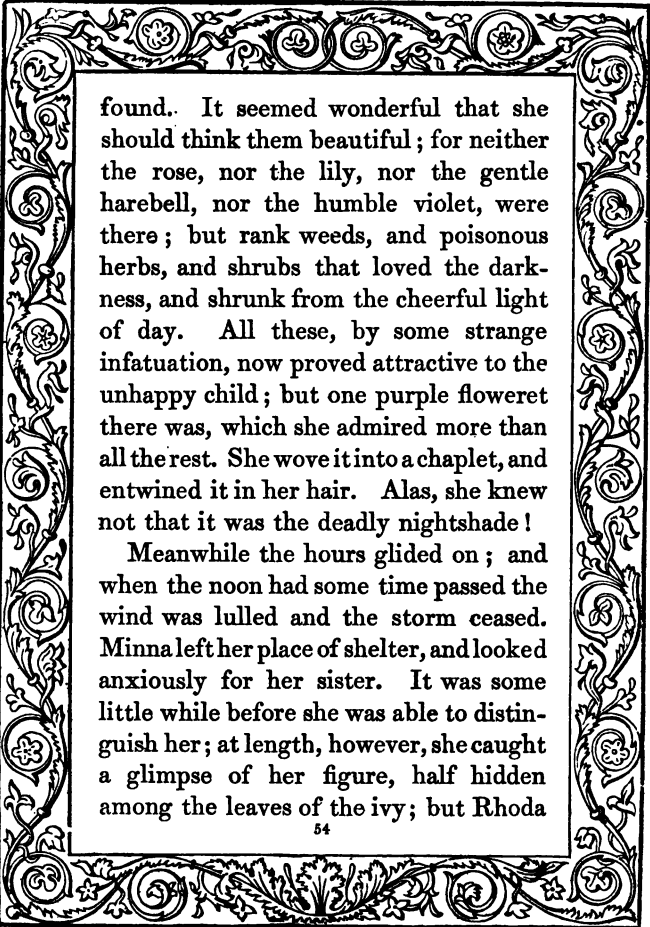
insects, and other strange murmurings that she heard ; and her heart sickened at the thought that, perhaps, she never might return to her sister again. More than once she half resolved to begin the attempt, but the rain seemed to descend faster than ever, and Rhoda had not courage to face the storm.

She still, therefore, lingered on until her ear became accustomed to the humming sounds, and her fears and anxieties began to subside. She soon learned to forget the innocent joys of the morning, and the distant hills, and the heavenly music ; her thoughts were confined to the narrow spot on which she stood, while, at the same time, all that the stranger had told her of its danger was scarce remembered at all. She now looked stealthily around, and began to examine the different plants and shrubs that grew upon the wall. There were some rich crimson mosses



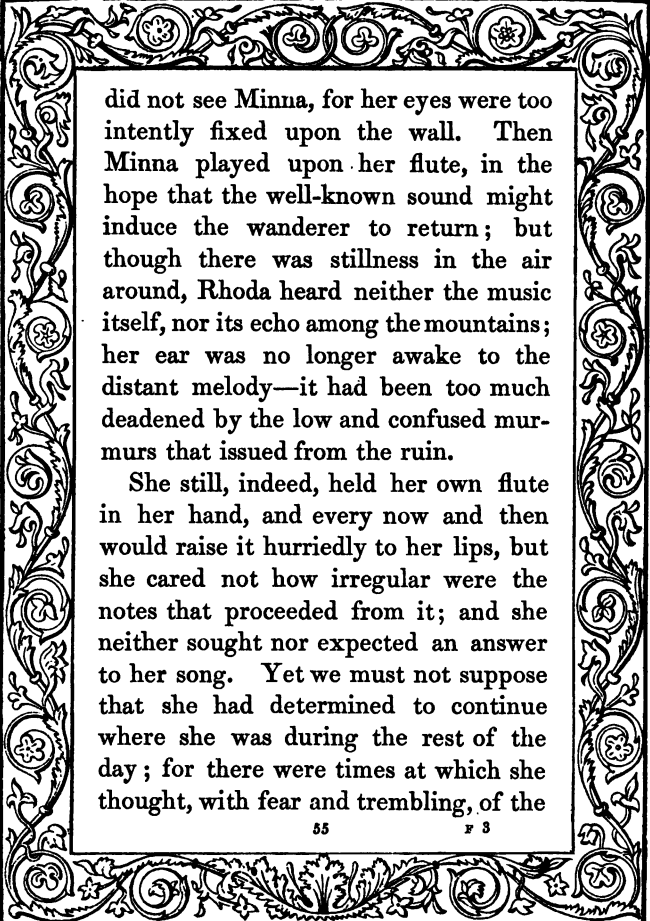
very near, and they were so unlike anything she had before seen, that they immediately attracted her attention. She raised her hand and touched one of them, and when it felt soft and delicate, she could not resist the temptation to gather it; yet she trembled exceedingly as she tried to separate it from the mouldering stone, for this was her first attempt to take anything from the ruin, and she half feared that it might altogether give way and crush her by its fall. There seemed, however, to be no immediate danger; the moss yielded at once to her slightest effort, and Rhoda pressed it gently to her cheek, and then concealed it in her bosom.

After this she gradually became bolder, and, leaving the place in which she had first taken refuge, crept along the side of the wall. She entered into every nook and corner, and gathered abundantly of the strange flowers that she



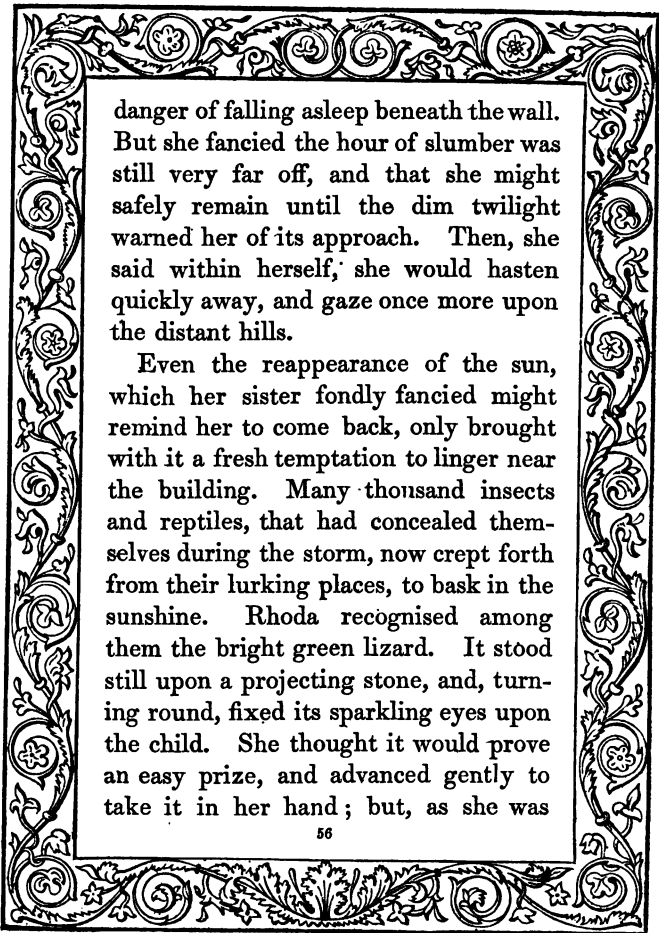
found. It seemed wonderful that she should think them beautiful ; for neither the rose, nor the lily, nor the gentle harebell, nor the humble violet, were there ; but rank weeds, and poisonous herbs, and shrubs that loved the darkness, and shrunk from the cheerful light of day. All these, by some strange infatuation, now proved attractive to the unhappy child ; but one purple floweret there was, which she admired more than all the rest. She wove it into a chaplet, and entwined it in her hair. Alas, she knew not that it was the deadly nightshade !

Meanwhile the hours glided on ; and when the noon had some time passed the wind was lulled and the storm ceased. Minna left her place of shelter, and looked anxiously for her sister. It was some little while before she was able to distinguish her ; at length, however, she caught a glimpse of her figure, half hidden among the leaves of the ivy ; but Rhoda



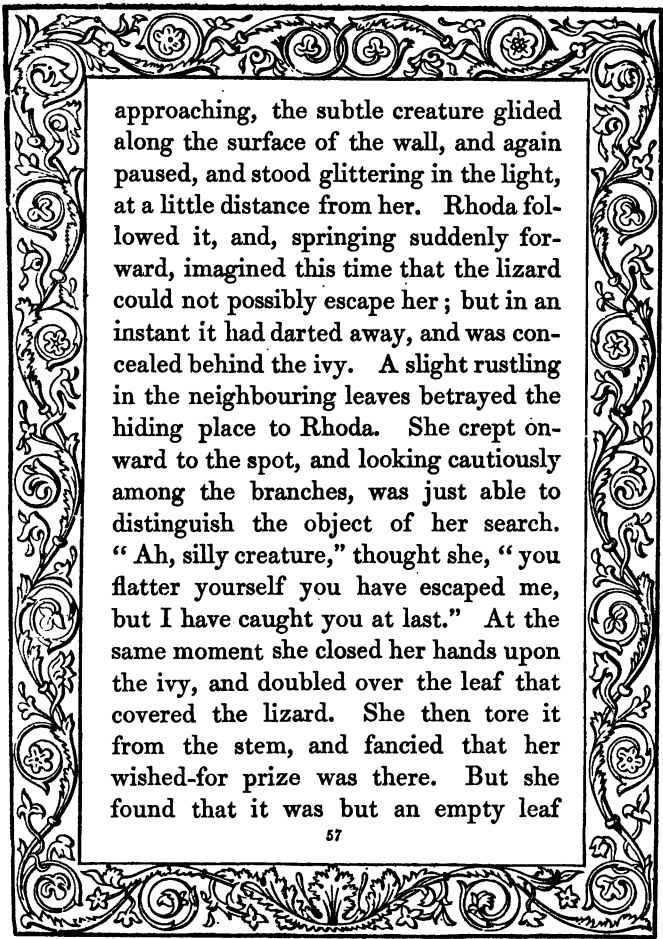
did not see Minna, for her eyes were too intently fixed upon the wall. Then Minna played upon her flute, in the hope that the well-known sound might induce the wanderer to return; but though there was stillness in the air around, Rhoda heard neither the music itself, nor its echo among the mountains; her ear was no longer awake to the distant melody—it had been too much deadened by the low and confused murmurs that issued from the ruin.

She still, indeed, held her own flute in her hand, and every now and then would raise it hurriedly to her lips, but she cared not how irregular were the notes that proceeded from it; and she neither sought nor expected an answer to her song. Yet we must not suppose that she had determined to continue where she was during the rest of the day; for there were times at which she thought, with fear and trembling, of the

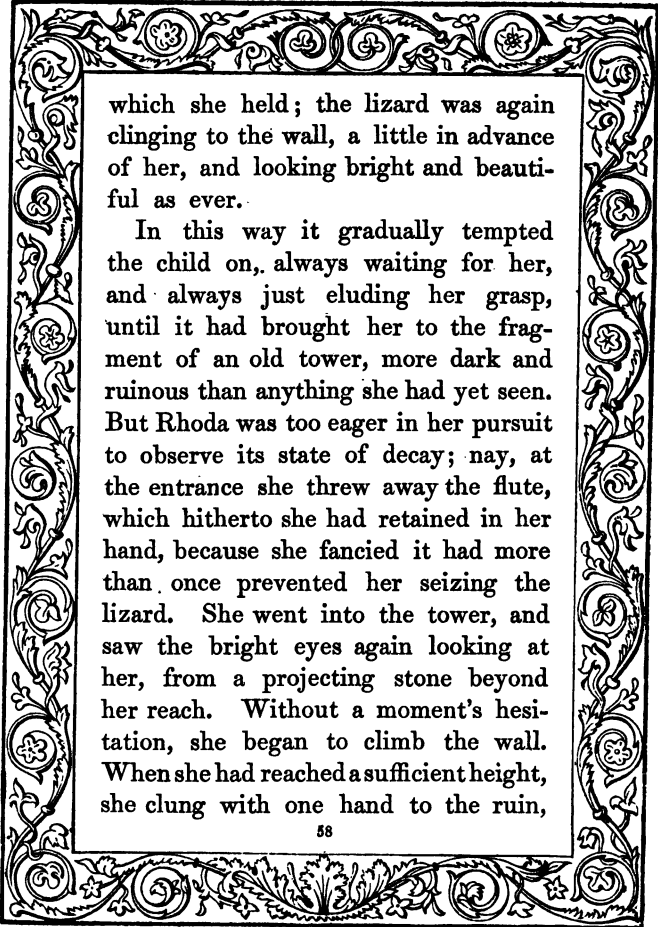


danger of falling asleep beneath the wall. But she fancied the hour of slumber was still very far off, and that she might safely remain until the dim twilight warned her of its approach. Then, she said within herself, she would hasten quickly away, and gaze once more upon the distant hills.

Even the reappearance of the sun, which her sister fondly fancied might remind her to come back, only brought with it a fresh temptation to linger near the building. Many thousand insects and reptiles, that had concealed themselves during the storm, now crept forth from their lurking places, to bask in the sunshine. Rhoda recognised among them the bright green lizard. It stood still upon a projecting stone, and, turning round, fixed its sparkling eyes upon the child. She thought it would prove an easy prize, and advanced gently to take it in her hand; but, as she was

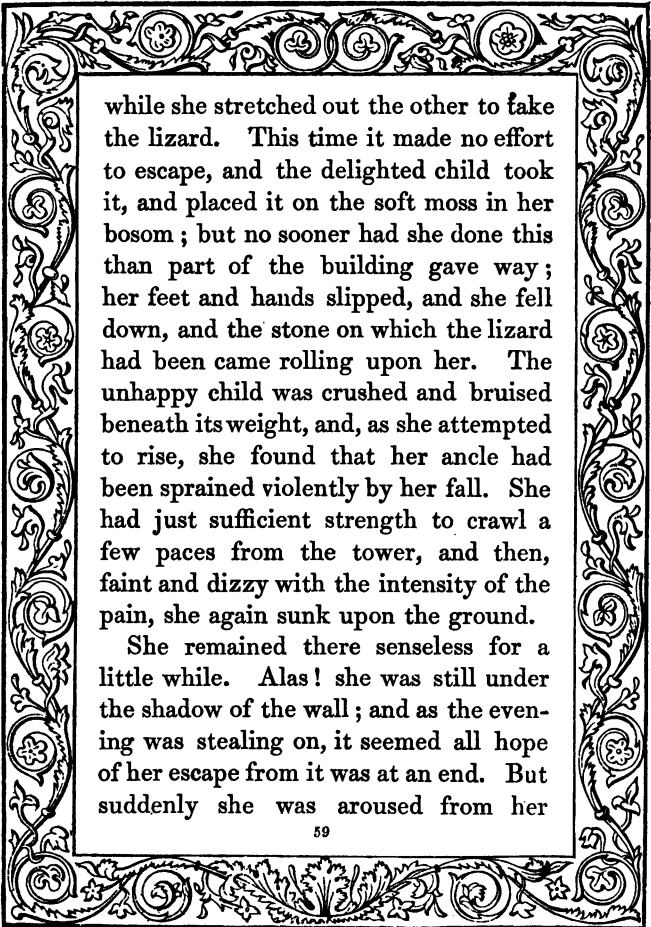


approaching, the subtle creature glided along the surface of the wall, and again paused, and stood glittering in the light, at a little distance from her. Rhoda followed it, and, springing suddenly forward, imagined this time that the lizard could not possibly escape her; but in an instant it had darted away, and was concealed behind the ivy. A slight rustling in the neighbouring leaves betrayed the hiding place to Rhoda. She crept onward to the spot, and looking cautiously among the branches, was just able to distinguish the object of her search. "Ah, silly creature," thought she, "you flatter yourself you have escaped me, but I have caught you at last." At the same moment she closed her hands upon the ivy, and doubled over the leaf that covered the lizard. She then tore it from the stem, and fancied that her wished-for prize was there. But she found that it was but an empty leaf



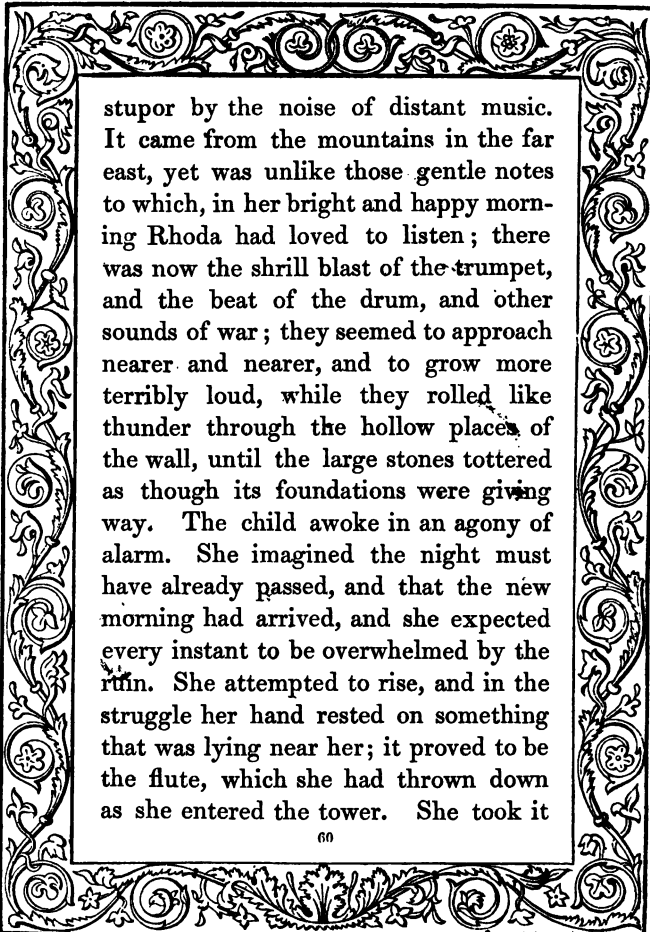
which she held; the lizard was again clinging to the wall, a little in advance of her, and looking bright and beautiful as ever.

In this way it gradually tempted the child on, always waiting for her, and always just eluding her grasp, until it had brought her to the fragment of an old tower, more dark and ruinous than anything she had yet seen. But Rhoda was too eager in her pursuit to observe its state of decay; nay, at the entrance she threw away the flute, which hitherto she had retained in her hand, because she fancied it had more than once prevented her seizing the lizard. She went into the tower, and saw the bright eyes again looking at her, from a projecting stone beyond her reach. Without a moment's hesitation, she began to climb the wall. When she had reached a sufficient height, she clung with one hand to the ruin,

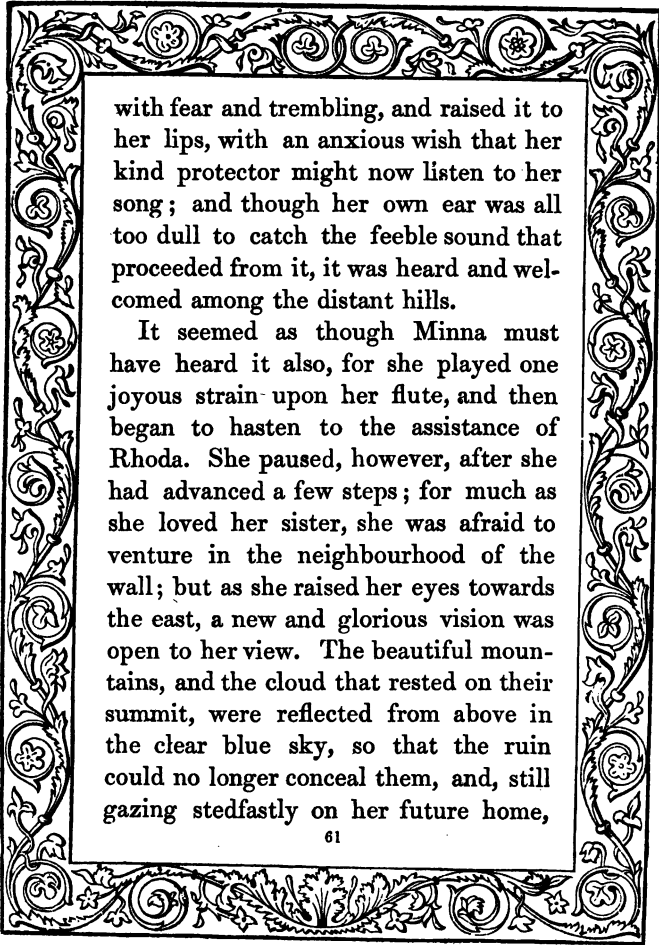


while she stretched out the other to take the lizard. This time it made no effort to escape, and the delighted child took it, and placed it on the soft moss in her bosom ; but no sooner had she done this than part of the building gave way ; her feet and hands slipped, and she fell down, and the stone on which the lizard had been came rolling upon her. The unhappy child was crushed and bruised beneath its weight, and, as she attempted to rise, she found that her ankle had been sprained violently by her fall. She had just sufficient strength to crawl a few paces from the tower, and then, faint and dizzy with the intensity of the pain, she again sunk upon the ground.

She remained there senseless for a little while. Alas ! she was still under the shadow of the wall ; and as the evening was stealing on, it seemed all hope of her escape from it was at an end. But suddenly she was aroused from her

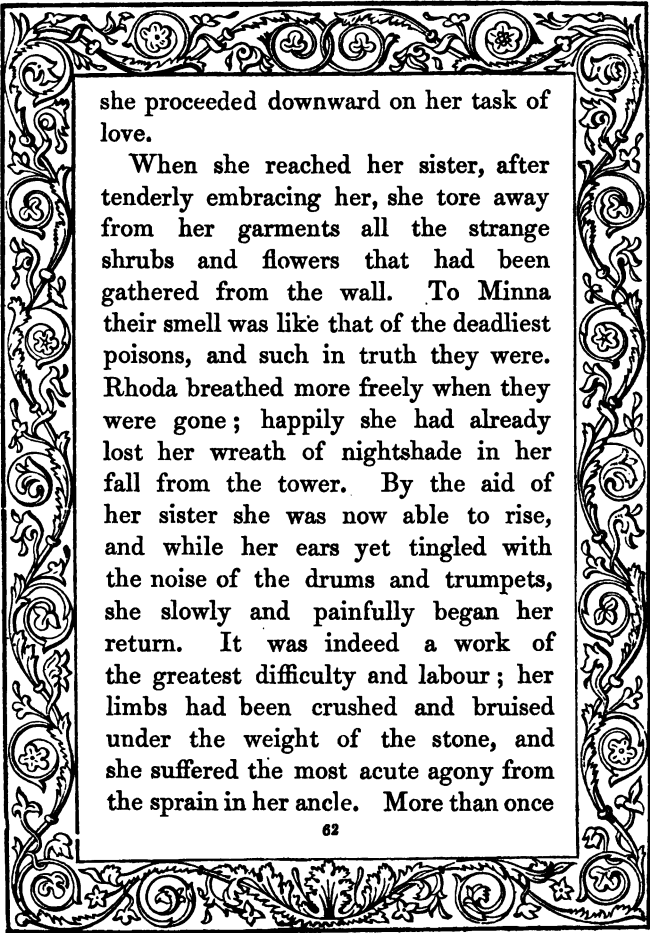


stupor by the noise of distant music. It came from the mountains in the far east, yet was unlike those gentle notes to which, in her bright and happy morning Rhoda had loved to listen; there was now the shrill blast of the trumpet, and the beat of the drum, and other sounds of war; they seemed to approach nearer and nearer, and to grow more terribly loud, while they rolled like thunder through the hollow places of the wall, until the large stones tottered as though its foundations were giving way. The child awoke in an agony of alarm. She imagined the night must have already passed, and that the new morning had arrived, and she expected every instant to be overwhelmed by the ruin. She attempted to rise, and in the struggle her hand rested on something that was lying near her; it proved to be the flute, which she had thrown down as she entered the tower. She took it



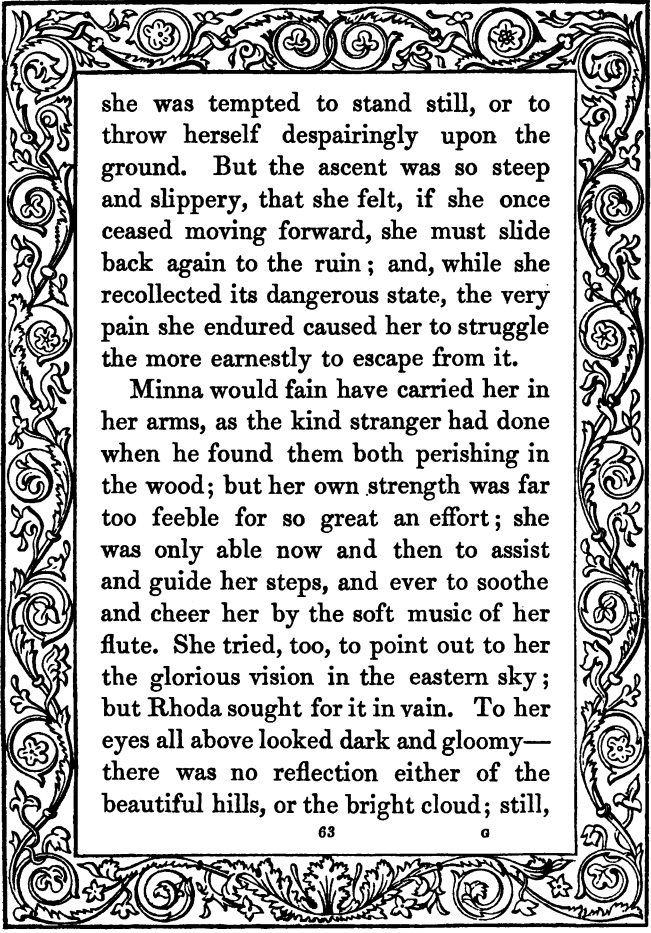
with fear and trembling, and raised it to her lips, with an anxious wish that her kind protector might now listen to her song; and though her own ear was all too dull to catch the feeble sound that proceeded from it, it was heard and welcomed among the distant hills.

It seemed as though Minna must have heard it also, for she played one joyous strain upon her flute, and then began to hasten to the assistance of Rhoda. She paused, however, after she had advanced a few steps; for much as she loved her sister, she was afraid to venture in the neighbourhood of the wall; but as she raised her eyes towards the east, a new and glorious vision was open to her view. The beautiful mountains, and the cloud that rested on their summit, were reflected from above in the clear blue sky, so that the ruin could no longer conceal them, and, still gazing stedfastly on her future home,



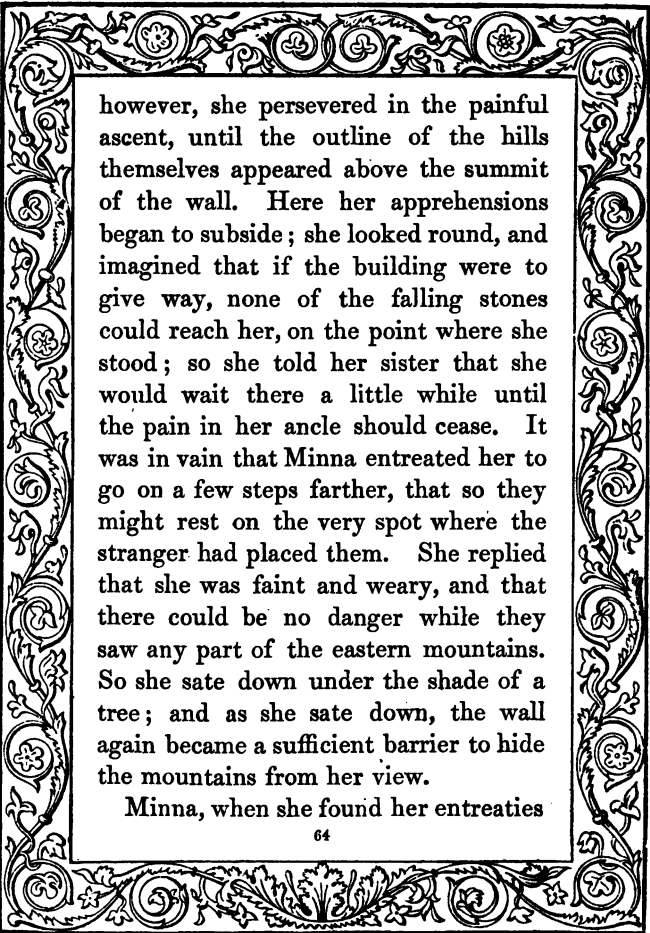
she proceeded downward on her task of love.

When she reached her sister, after tenderly embracing her, she tore away from her garments all the strange shrubs and flowers that had been gathered from the wall. To Minna their smell was like that of the deadliest poisons, and such in truth they were. Rhoda breathed more freely when they were gone; happily she had already lost her wreath of nightshade in her fall from the tower. By the aid of her sister she was now able to rise, and while her ears yet tingled with the noise of the drums and trumpets, she slowly and painfully began her return. It was indeed a work of the greatest difficulty and labour; her limbs had been crushed and bruised under the weight of the stone, and she suffered the most acute agony from the sprain in her ankle. More than once



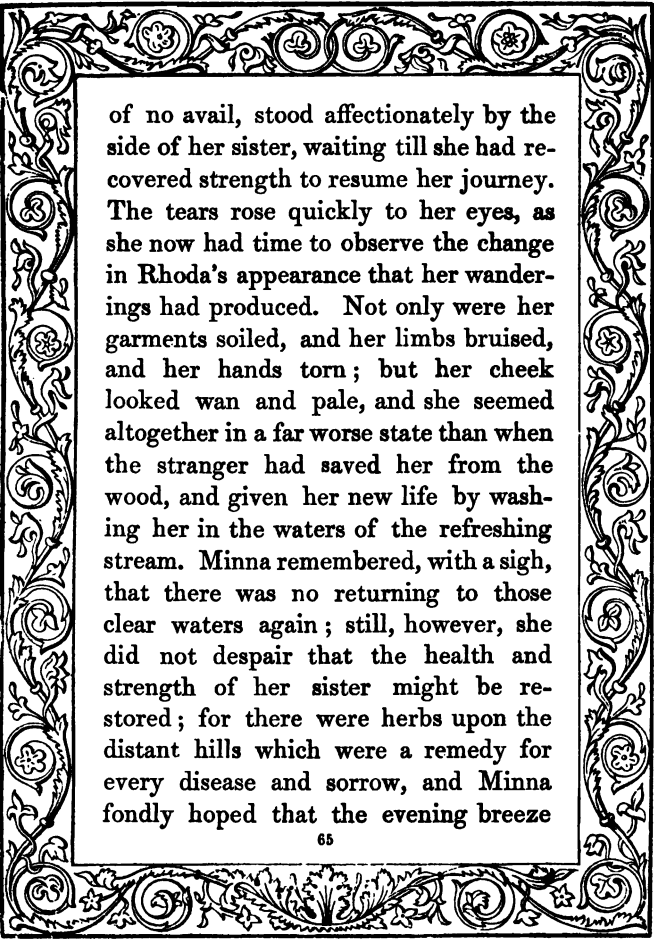
she was tempted to stand still, or to throw herself despairingly upon the ground. But the ascent was so steep and slippery, that she felt, if she once ceased moving forward, she must slide back again to the ruin; and, while she recollected its dangerous state, the very pain she endured caused her to struggle the more earnestly to escape from it.

Minna would fain have carried her in her arms, as the kind stranger had done when he found them both perishing in the wood; but her own strength was far too feeble for so great an effort; she was only able now and then to assist and guide her steps, and ever to soothe and cheer her by the soft music of her flute. She tried, too, to point out to her the glorious vision in the eastern sky; but Rhoda sought for it in vain. To her eyes all above looked dark and gloomy—there was no reflection either of the beautiful hills, or the bright cloud; still,



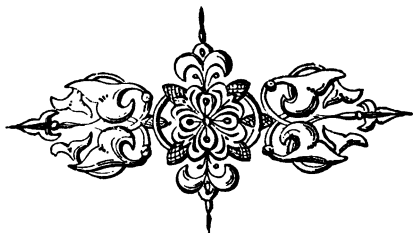
however, she persevered in the painful ascent, until the outline of the hills themselves appeared above the summit of the wall. Here her apprehensions began to subside; she looked round, and imagined that if the building were to give way, none of the falling stones could reach her, on the point where she stood; so she told her sister that she would wait there a little while until the pain in her ankle should cease. It was in vain that Minna entreated her to go on a few steps farther, that so they might rest on the very spot where the stranger had placed them. She replied that she was faint and weary, and that there could be no danger while they saw any part of the eastern mountains. So she sate down under the shade of a tree; and as she sate down, the wall again became a sufficient barrier to hide the mountains from her view.

Minna, when she found her entreaties

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of no avail, stood affectionately by the side of her sister, waiting till she had recovered strength to resume her journey. The tears rose quickly to her eyes, as she now had time to observe the change in Rhoda's appearance that her wanderings had produced. Not only were her garments soiled, and her limbs bruised, and her hands torn ; but her cheek looked wan and pale, and she seemed altogether in a far worse state than when the stranger had saved her from the wood, and given her new life by washing her in the waters of the refreshing stream. Minna remembered, with a sigh, that there was no returning to those clear waters again ; still, however, she did not despair that the health and strength of her sister might be restored ; for there were herbs upon the distant hills which were a remedy for every disease and sorrow, and Minna fondly hoped that the evening breeze

would waft their fragrance to Rhoda, and so soothe her sufferings and assuage her pain, that when the night closed upon her, she might lie down in peace to rest. Alas! she did not know that her sister carried that in her bosom which would cause those freshening winds to blow upon her in vain.



Questions on Chapter II.

Q. WHAT is meant by the morning sunshine which the children expected to continue throughout the day?

A. The peace and happiness of their early years, which caused them to forget that trials might await them in after life.

Q. What is the approach of the storm?

A. The coming of a time of trouble.

Q. Why are we told that the spot on which Rhoda and Minna stood was more than any other exposed to the wind and rain?

A. Does it not mean that it was their religion which exposed them to trouble?

Q. Yes. It often pleases God that a strict obedience to his commands should be a cause of present trouble to us. We may not, indeed, be called upon to lay down our lives for the sake of Christ, as were the holy martyrs of old; but we must still take up our cross in order to follow Him. If we are resolved to continue His faithful disciples, we must be content to endure many trials and afflictions which we might avoid at once by forsaking Him, and conforming ourselves to the world. Now, what effect had the storm on Rhoda?

A. She took shelter beneath the dangerous wall.

Q. What effect had it upon Minna?

A. She remained on the spot where she had been left, and played upon her flute.

Q. Observe, then, that the very same trial caused one sister to seek refuge in the world, the other to have recourse

to prayer ; and the reason was, that the one in her heart loved the things of the world, while the other loved God. What is signified by the cypress-tree being blown down by the storm, and affording shelter to Minna ?

A. That God, even out of affliction itself, can bring us comfort, if we pray for His assistance, and patiently wait for it.

Q. Yes, and will often, in the most unexpected manner, raise up a defence and protection to those who in quietness and confidence put their trust in Him. What is signified by the uneasiness and fears of Rhoda, when first she found refuge beneath the ruin ?

A. The consciousness of having done wrong, and the dread of punishment.

Q. Why did she not at once hasten back ?

A. Because she had not resolution to face the storm, from which the wall afforded her protection.

Q. That is to say, she was anxious for that peace of mind which religion alone could afford her, but would not make the sacrifice by which it was to be obtained. What do you understand by her head growing giddy with the smell of the flowers, and the buzzing of the insects?

A. The cares and pleasures of the world gradually overcame her better feelings, and made her forgetful of her danger.

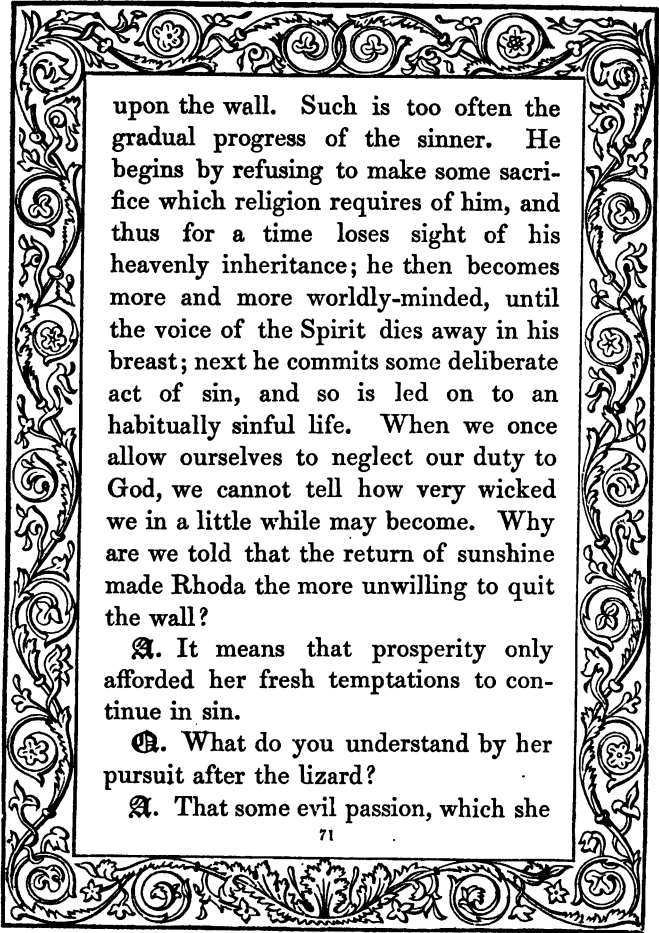
Q. What is signified by the moss which Rhoda plucked from the ruin?

A. Some sinful pleasure in which she deliberately indulged.

Q. Why is it said that no part of the building gave way?

A. It means that she escaped punishment.

Q. Yes, and the consequence was, that she afterwards gathered abundantly of all the poisonous herbs that grew



upon the wall. Such is too often the gradual progress of the sinner. He begins by refusing to make some sacrifice which religion requires of him, and thus for a time loses sight of his heavenly inheritance; he then becomes more and more worldly-minded, until the voice of the Spirit dies away in his breast; next he commits some deliberate act of sin, and so is led on to an habitually sinful life. When we once allow ourselves to neglect our duty to God, we cannot tell how very wicked we in a little while may become. Why are we told that the return of sunshine made Rhoda the more unwilling to quit the wall?

A. It means that prosperity only afforded her fresh temptations to continue in sin.

Q. What do you understand by her pursuit after the lizard?

A. That some evil passion, which she

was resolved to gratify, led her on through a long course of wickedness.

Q. What is meant by her throwing down her flute?

A. That she gave up the outward form of praying to God.

Q. Yes, the spirit of prayer had long been absent from her heart, she now abandoned its words also; and she did this because they seemed to act as a restraint upon her in her pursuit of evil. What is signified by her falling from the tower directly she had obtained possession of the lizard?

A. That no sooner had she gratified her evil passion, than it pleased God to visit her sin with an immediate punishment.

Q. What effect had this upon Rhoda?

A. She hurried away from the ruined tower, and then sank upon the ground.

Q. From this we are to understand

that the judgment which God sent in mercy, while it drove her away from a further commission of sin, overwhelmed her for a time with despair. What do you understand by the music from the east, that aroused her from her stupor?

A. The working of God's Holy Spirit in her heart.

Q. Yes, and the sounds are described as loud and terrible, because it pleased God to awaken her by the pangs of remorse, and the dread of His anger. How was Minna enabled to come to assist Rhoda without losing sight of the distant hills?

A. She saw them reflected in the sky.

Q. From this, then, we are to learn, that if we seek the company of sinners, with the sincere desire of bringing them back to the way of life, God will not suffer the evil we are forced to behold to hinder our contemplation of the joys

of heaven. What do you understand by Minna tearing away the shrubs and flowers from the garments of her sister?

A. She persuaded her to renounce her worldly pleasures.

Q. What is signified by the bruises and the sprain, which caused the ascent from the wall to be so painful to Rhoda?

A. The anguish of spirit, and the deep sense of shame, which were the consequences of her former sin.

Q. Why are we told that the ascent was so slippery that she could not stand still?

A. Because, when we resolve to amend our lives, we must struggle continually against our evil habits, or we shall fall into them again.

Q. Yes, it will not do to halt in the path of repentance; to hesitate to return to God, is, in truth, to suffer

ourselves to be drawn back to the world. Why is it said that Minna was unable to carry her sister in her arms as the kind stranger had done in the morning?

A. Because none but our Saviour can deliver us from the bondage of sin. He may send others to point out the path, but it is His Spirit alone that can sustain us while we walk therein.

Q. What is signified by Rhoda sitting down to rest as soon as the distant hills appeared in view?

A. She was content with an imperfect repentance, and did not persevere unto the end. As soon as the immediate dread of God's wrath subsided, and her hopes of Heaven were partially restored, she made no effort to grow in grace and devote her whole heart to the service of Christ.

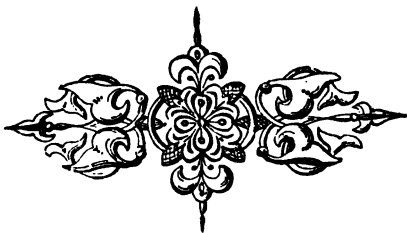
Q. What was the consequence of this?

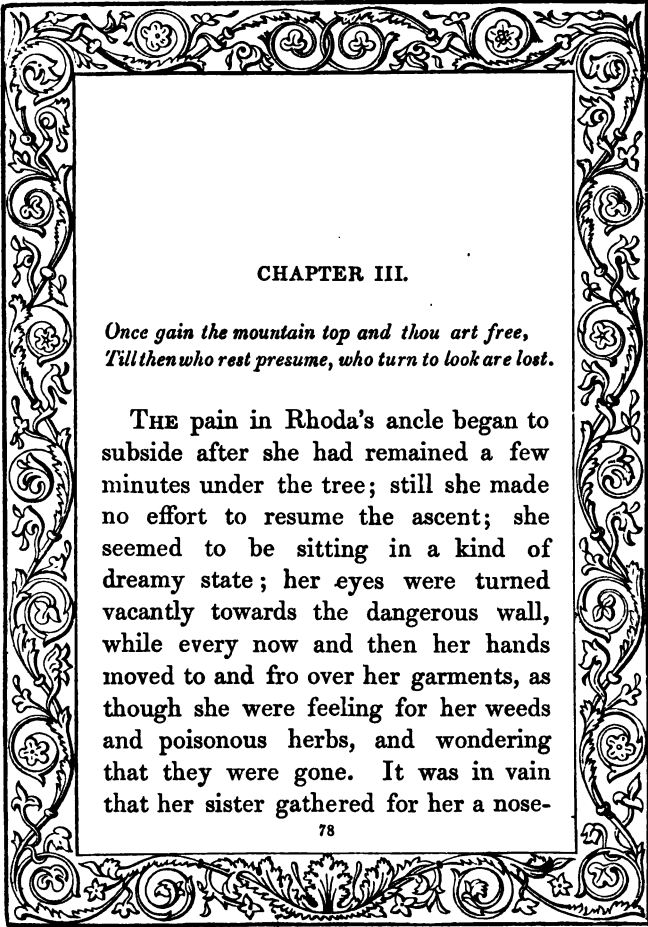
A. That as she sate down her hope of heaven passed away, for she again lost sight of the distant hills.

A. Observe, then, that while she stood up and continued her struggle against sin, she saw heaven; but labour and painful watchfulness were the only means by which God as yet permitted her to behold it; no sooner did she venture to rest, than, though she remained on the very same spot, she saw it no more. The whole path of repentance is beset with snares; but no point is more dangerous than that at which we first feel the burthen of our sins lessened, and the fear of punishment removed. We are then, like Rhoda, tempted to give way to the presumptuous thought, that we have done enough, and may rest a little while before we endeavour to increase in holiness. Alas, if we yield to this temptation, not only will the hope of heaven pass away from our hearts,

but the evil spirit that has been driven from thence, finding them thus empty, will return again, and we shall soon fall into a worse state than before. Do you recollect the words of our Saviour, to which I am now alluding?

A. Yes. He tells us that, when the evil spirit has been driven out of a man, he will after a time return, and if he find the house, that he has left, empty, swept, and garnished, he will enter in with seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and take possession of it again.

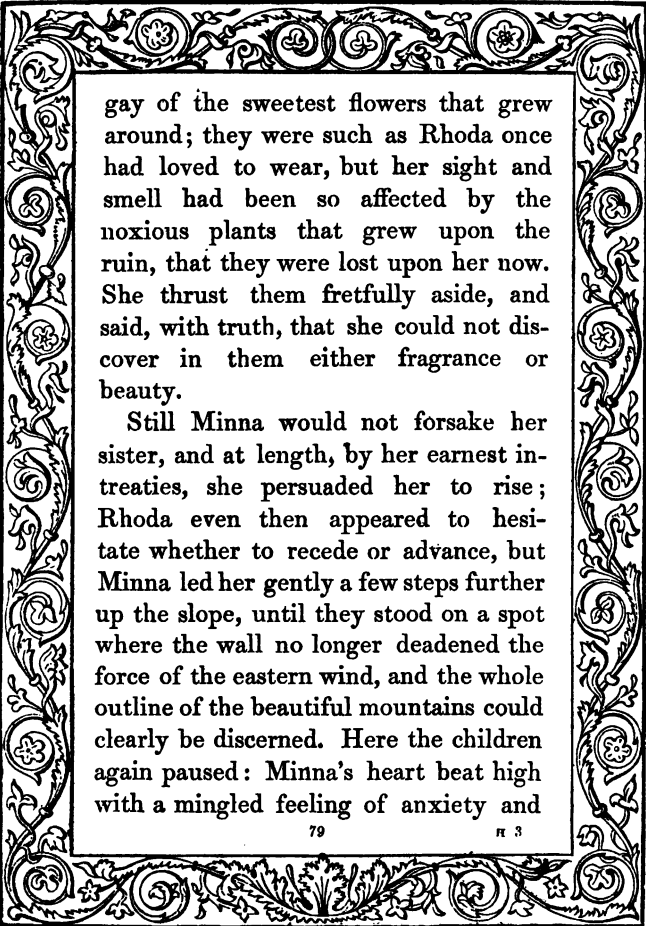




CHAPTER III.

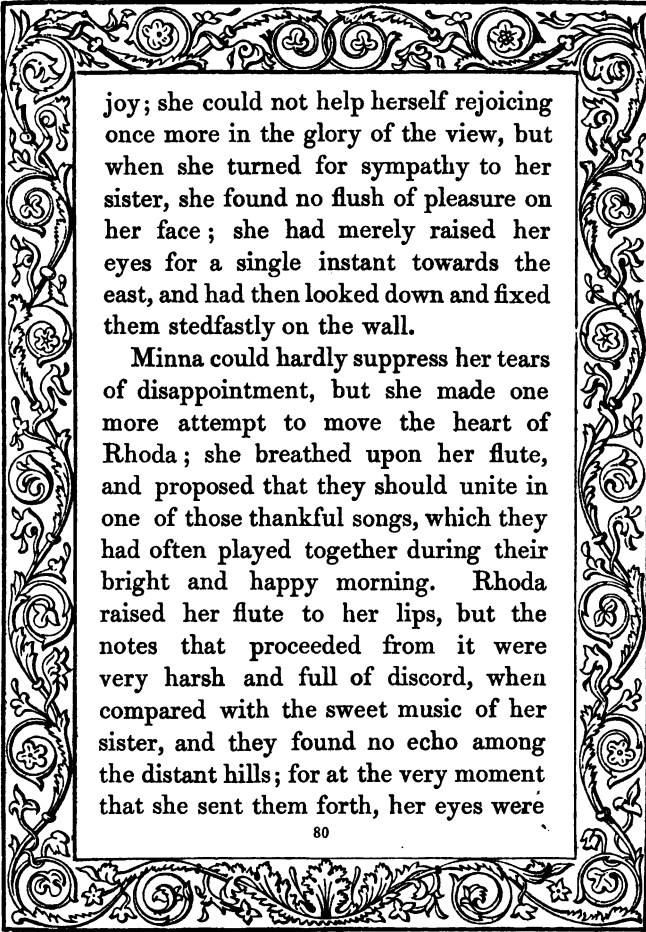
*Once gain the mountain top and thou art free,
Till then who rest presume, who turn to look are lost.*

THE pain in Rhoda's ankle began to subside after she had remained a few minutes under the tree; still she made no effort to resume the ascent; she seemed to be sitting in a kind of dreamy state; her eyes were turned vacantly towards the dangerous wall, while every now and then her hands moved to and fro over her garments, as though she were feeling for her weeds and poisonous herbs, and wondering that they were gone. It was in vain that her sister gathered for her a nose-



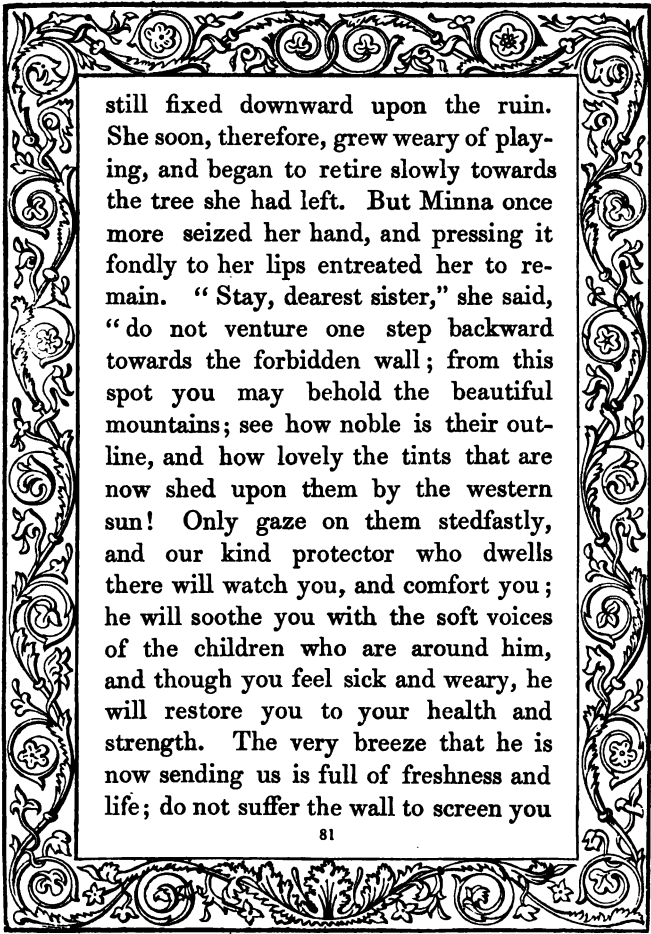
gay of the sweetest flowers that grew around; they were such as Rhoda once had loved to wear, but her sight and smell had been so affected by the noxious plants that grew upon the ruin, that they were lost upon her now. She thrust them fretfully aside, and said, with truth, that she could not discover in them either fragrance or beauty.

Still Minna would not forsake her sister, and at length, by her earnest intreaties, she persuaded her to rise; Rhoda even then appeared to hesitate whether to recede or advance, but Minna led her gently a few steps further up the slope, until they stood on a spot where the wall no longer deadened the force of the eastern wind, and the whole outline of the beautiful mountains could clearly be discerned. Here the children again paused: Minna's heart beat high with a mingled feeling of anxiety and

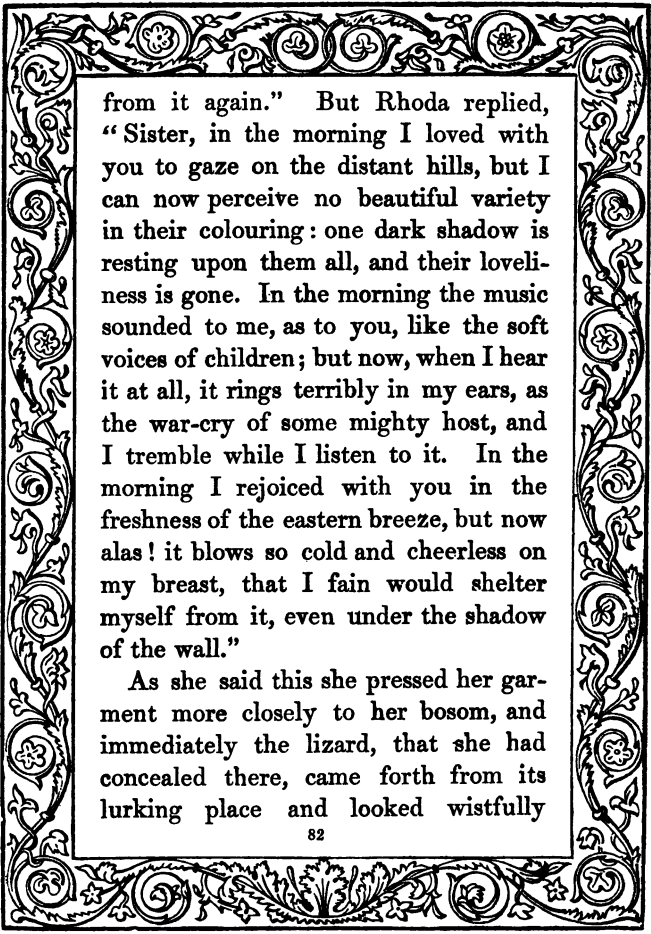


joy; she could not help herself rejoicing once more in the glory of the view, but when she turned for sympathy to her sister, she found no flush of pleasure on her face; she had merely raised her eyes for a single instant towards the east, and had then looked down and fixed them stedfastly on the wall.

Minna could hardly suppress her tears of disappointment, but she made one more attempt to move the heart of Rhoda; she breathed upon her flute, and proposed that they should unite in one of those thankful songs, which they had often played together during their bright and happy morning. Rhoda raised her flute to her lips, but the notes that proceeded from it were very harsh and full of discord, when compared with the sweet music of her sister, and they found no echo among the distant hills; for at the very moment that she sent them forth, her eyes were

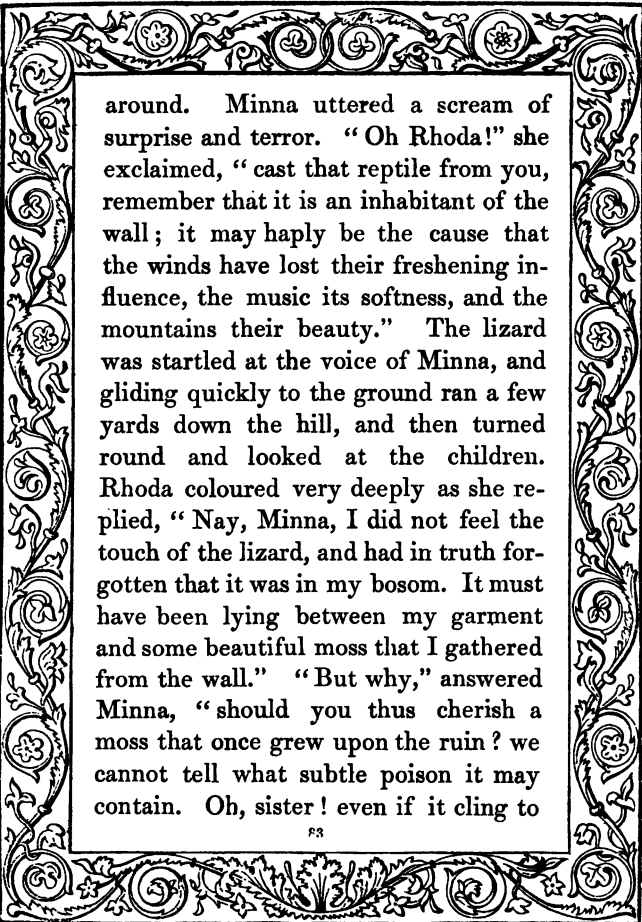


still fixed downward upon the ruin. She soon, therefore, grew weary of playing, and began to retire slowly towards the tree she had left. But Minna once more seized her hand, and pressing it fondly to her lips entreated her to remain. "Stay, dearest sister," she said, "do not venture one step backward towards the forbidden wall; from this spot you may behold the beautiful mountains; see how noble is their outline, and how lovely the tints that are now shed upon them by the western sun! Only gaze on them stedfastly, and our kind protector who dwells there will watch you, and comfort you; he will soothe you with the soft voices of the children who are around him, and though you feel sick and weary, he will restore you to your health and strength. The very breeze that he is now sending us is full of freshness and life; do not suffer the wall to screen you

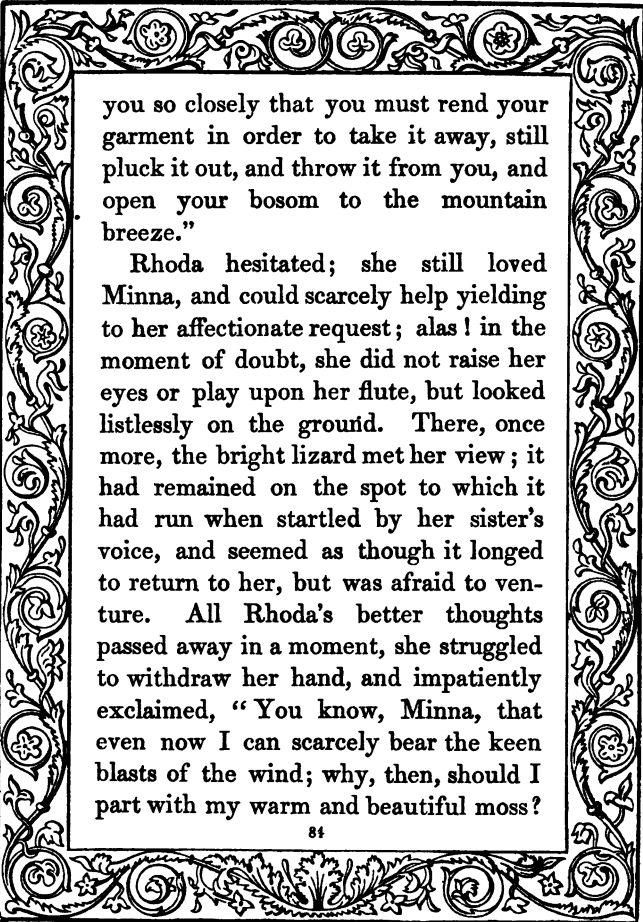


from it again." But Rhoda replied, "Sister, in the morning I loved with you to gaze on the distant hills, but I can now perceive no beautiful variety in their colouring: one dark shadow is resting upon them all, and their loveliness is gone. In the morning the music sounded to me, as to you, like the soft voices of children; but now, when I hear it at all, it rings terribly in my ears, as the war-cry of some mighty host, and I tremble while I listen to it. In the morning I rejoiced with you in the freshness of the eastern breeze, but now alas! it blows so cold and cheerless on my breast, that I fain would shelter myself from it, even under the shadow of the wall."

As she said this she pressed her garment more closely to her bosom, and immediately the lizard, that she had concealed there, came forth from its lurking place and looked wistfully

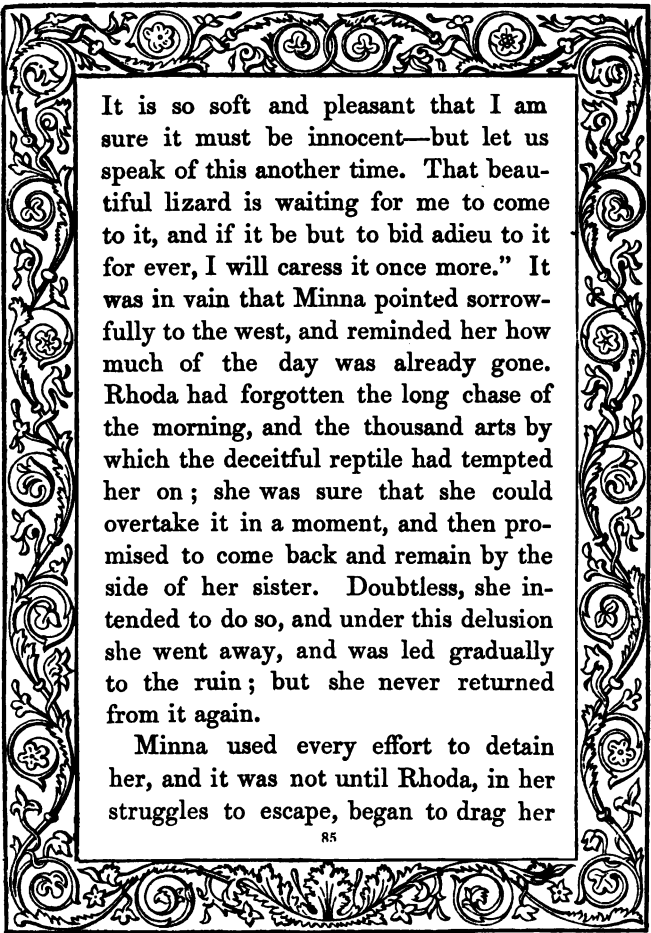


around. Minna uttered a scream of surprise and terror. "Oh Rhoda!" she exclaimed, "cast that reptile from you, remember that it is an inhabitant of the wall; it may haply be the cause that the winds have lost their freshening influence, the music its softness, and the mountains their beauty." The lizard was startled at the voice of Minna, and gliding quickly to the ground ran a few yards down the hill, and then turned round and looked at the children. Rhoda coloured very deeply as she replied, "Nay, Minna, I did not feel the touch of the lizard, and had in truth forgotten that it was in my bosom. It must have been lying between my garment and some beautiful moss that I gathered from the wall." "But why," answered Minna, "should you thus cherish a moss that once grew upon the ruin? we cannot tell what subtle poison it may contain. Oh, sister! even if it cling to

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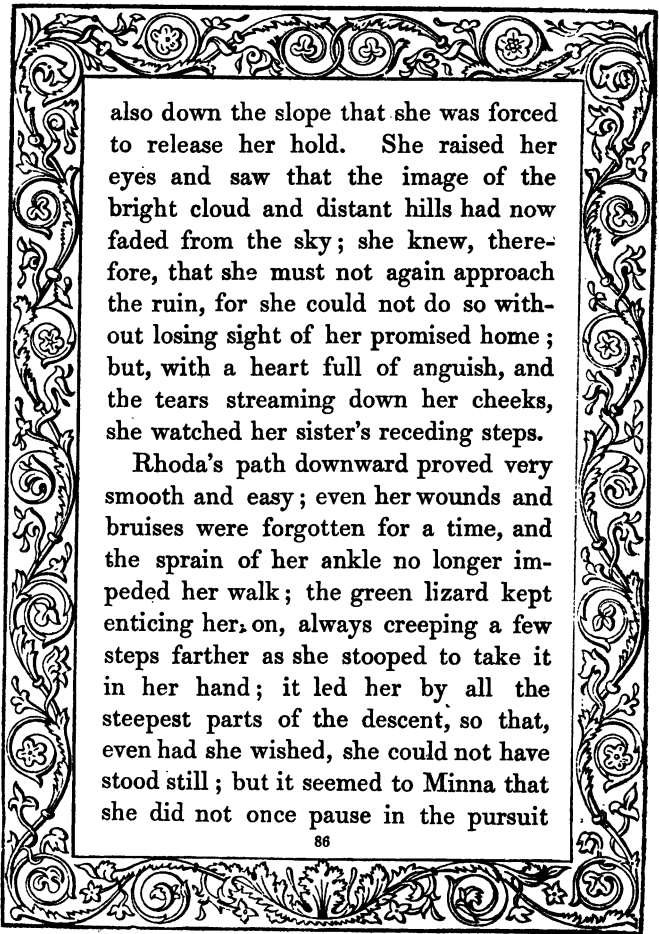
you so closely that you must rend your garment in order to take it away, still pluck it out, and throw it from you, and open your bosom to the mountain breeze."

Rhoda hesitated; she still loved Minna, and could scarcely help yielding to her affectionate request; alas! in the moment of doubt, she did not raise her eyes or play upon her flute, but looked listlessly on the ground. There, once more, the bright lizard met her view; it had remained on the spot to which it had run when startled by her sister's voice, and seemed as though it longed to return to her, but was afraid to venture. All Rhoda's better thoughts passed away in a moment, she struggled to withdraw her hand, and impatiently exclaimed, "You know, Minna, that even now I can scarcely bear the keen blasts of the wind; why, then, should I part with my warm and beautiful moss?"



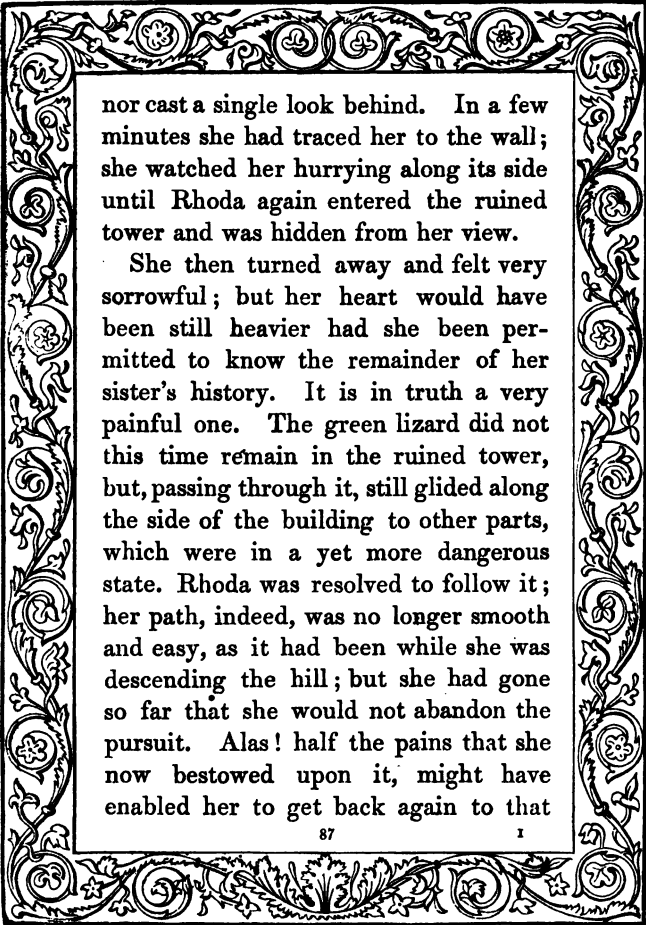
It is so soft and pleasant that I am sure it must be innocent—but let us speak of this another time. That beautiful lizard is waiting for me to come to it, and if it be but to bid adieu to it for ever, I will caress it once more." It was in vain that Minna pointed sorrowfully to the west, and reminded her how much of the day was already gone. Rhoda had forgotten the long chase of the morning, and the thousand arts by which the deceitful reptile had tempted her on; she was sure that she could overtake it in a moment, and then promised to come back and remain by the side of her sister. Doubtless, she intended to do so, and under this delusion she went away, and was led gradually to the ruin; but she never returned from it again.

Minna used every effort to detain her, and it was not until Rhoda, in her struggles to escape, began to drag her



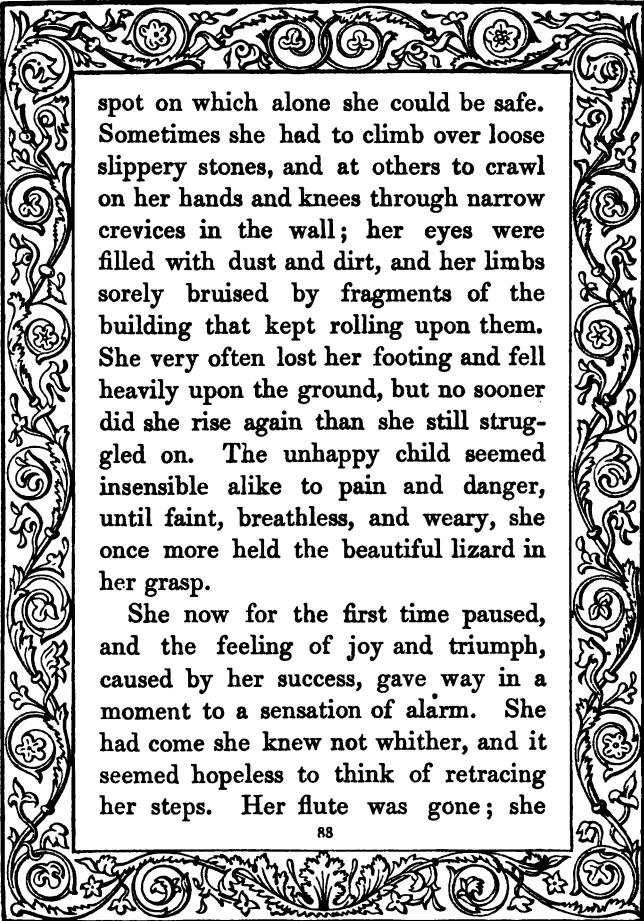
also down the slope that she was forced to release her hold. She raised her eyes and saw that the image of the bright cloud and distant hills had now faded from the sky; she knew, therefore, that she must not again approach the ruin, for she could not do so without losing sight of her promised home; but, with a heart full of anguish, and the tears streaming down her cheeks, she watched her sister's receding steps.

Rhoda's path downward proved very smooth and easy; even her wounds and bruises were forgotten for a time, and the sprain of her ankle no longer impeded her walk; the green lizard kept enticing her, on, always creeping a few steps farther as she stooped to take it in her hand; it led her by all the steepest parts of the descent, so that, even had she wished, she could not have stood still; but it seemed to Minna that she did not once pause in the pursuit



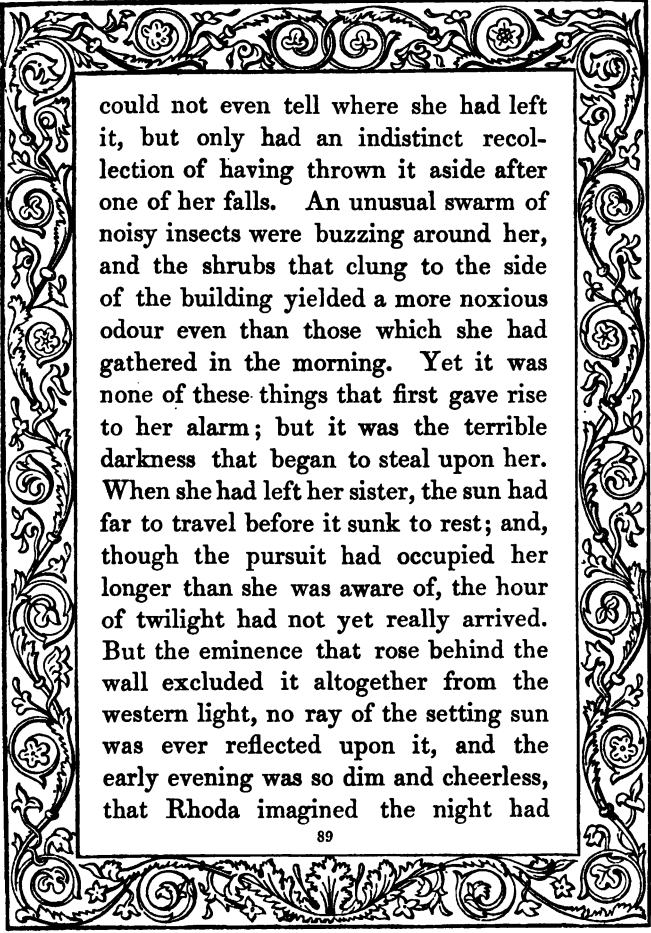
nor cast a single look behind. In a few minutes she had traced her to the wall; she watched her hurrying along its side until Rhoda again entered the ruined tower and was hidden from her view.

She then turned away and felt very sorrowful; but her heart would have been still heavier had she been permitted to know the remainder of her sister's history. It is in truth a very painful one. The green lizard did not this time remain in the ruined tower, but, passing through it, still glided along the side of the building to other parts, which were in a yet more dangerous state. Rhoda was resolved to follow it; her path, indeed, was no longer smooth and easy, as it had been while she was descending the hill; but she had gone so far that she would not abandon the pursuit. Alas! half the pains that she now bestowed upon it, might have enabled her to get back again to that

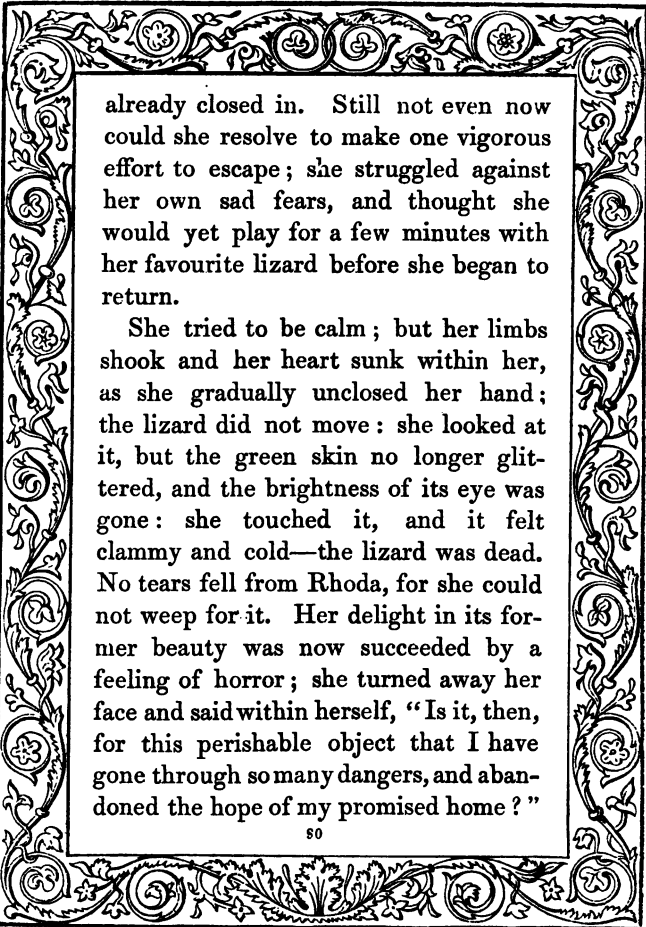


spot on which alone she could be safe. Sometimes she had to climb over loose slippery stones, and at others to crawl on her hands and knees through narrow crevices in the wall; her eyes were filled with dust and dirt, and her limbs sorely bruised by fragments of the building that kept rolling upon them. She very often lost her footing and fell heavily upon the ground, but no sooner did she rise again than she still struggled on. The unhappy child seemed insensible alike to pain and danger, until faint, breathless, and weary, she once more held the beautiful lizard in her grasp.

She now for the first time paused, and the feeling of joy and triumph, caused by her success, gave way in a moment to a sensation of alarm. She had come she knew not whither, and it seemed hopeless to think of retracing her steps. Her flute was gone; she

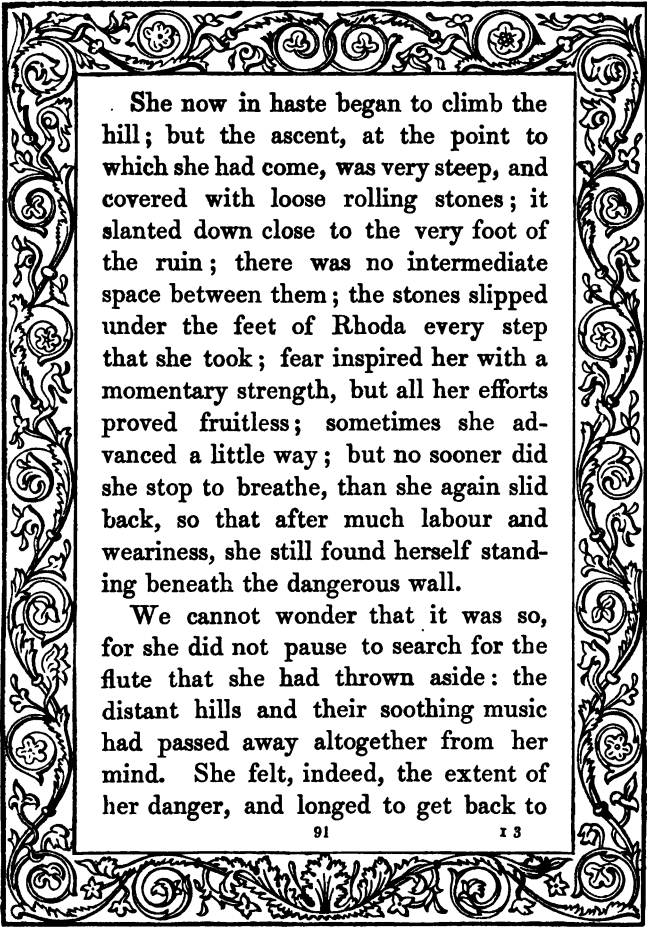


could not even tell where she had left it, but only had an indistinct recollection of having thrown it aside after one of her falls. An unusual swarm of noisy insects were buzzing around her, and the shrubs that clung to the side of the building yielded a more noxious odour even than those which she had gathered in the morning. Yet it was none of these things that first gave rise to her alarm; but it was the terrible darkness that began to steal upon her. When she had left her sister, the sun had far to travel before it sunk to rest; and, though the pursuit had occupied her longer than she was aware of, the hour of twilight had not yet really arrived. But the eminence that rose behind the wall excluded it altogether from the western light, no ray of the setting sun was ever reflected upon it, and the early evening was so dim and cheerless, that Rhoda imagined the night had



already closed in. Still not even now could she resolve to make one vigorous effort to escape; she struggled against her own sad fears, and thought she would yet play for a few minutes with her favourite lizard before she began to return.

She tried to be calm; but her limbs shook and her heart sunk within her, as she gradually unclosed her hand; the lizard did not move: she looked at it, but the green skin no longer glittered, and the brightness of its eye was gone: she touched it, and it felt clammy and cold—the lizard was dead. No tears fell from Rhoda, for she could not weep for it. Her delight in its former beauty was now succeeded by a feeling of horror; she turned away her face and said within herself, "Is it, then, for this perishable object that I have gone through so many dangers, and abandoned the hope of my promised home?"

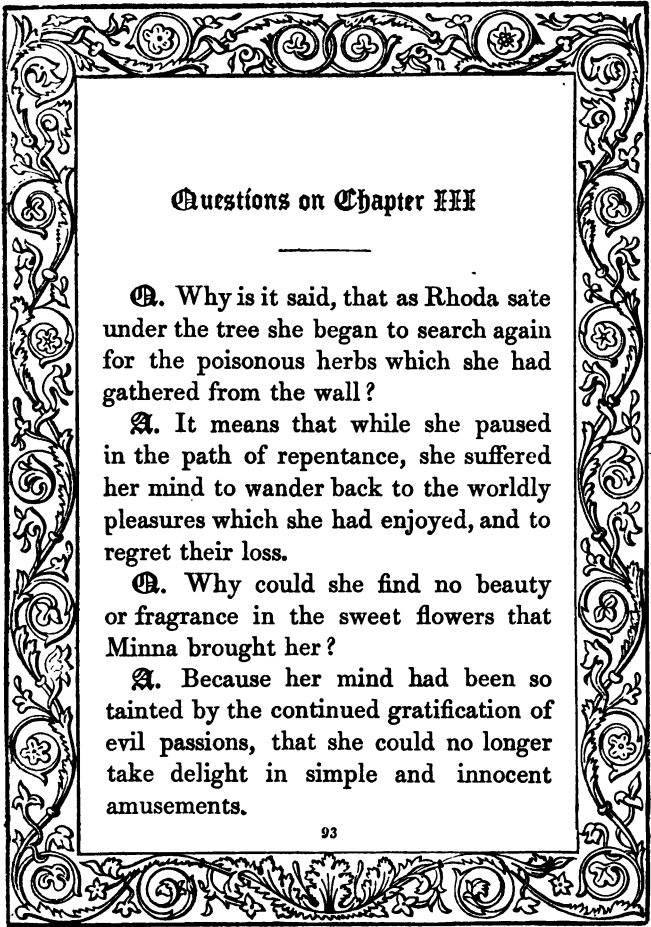


She now in haste began to climb the hill; but the ascent, at the point to which she had come, was very steep, and covered with loose rolling stones; it slanted down close to the very foot of the ruin; there was no intermediate space between them; the stones slipped under the feet of Rhoda every step that she took; fear inspired her with a momentary strength, but all her efforts proved fruitless; sometimes she advanced a little way; but no sooner did she stop to breathe, than she again slid back, so that after much labour and weariness, she still found herself standing beneath the dangerous wall.

We cannot wonder that it was so, for she did not pause to search for the flute that she had thrown aside: the distant hills and their soothing music had passed away altogether from her mind. She felt, indeed, the extent of her danger, and longed to get back to

the pleasant spot on which she had spent the morning of her day, but she could not fix her affections on that kind protector who had promised, if she called out for his aid, to assist her to return.





Questions on Chapter III

Q. Why is it said, that as Rhoda sate under the tree she began to search again for the poisonous herbs which she had gathered from the wall?

A. It means that while she paused in the path of repentance, she suffered her mind to wander back to the worldly pleasures which she had enjoyed, and to regret their loss.

Q. Why could she find no beauty or fragrance in the sweet flowers that Minna brought her?

A. Because her mind had been so tainted by the continued gratification of evil passions, that she could no longer take delight in simple and innocent amusements.

Q. Yes. This is one punishment which is sure to follow the long indulgence of sin. Those who forsake an evil habit must not expect to be so happy as they would have been if they had never formed it; for its effects will still remain so as to unfit them for many pleasures which they might otherwise have enjoyed. How did Minna try to comfort her sister?

A. She persuaded her to play upon her flute, and to watch the distant hills, and welcome the eastern breeze.

Q. That is to say, she bade her have recourse to prayer, and to fix her affections on heavenly things, and await the influence of God's sustaining Spirit. Though earthly occupations and amusements cannot cure the disease that sin leaves in the soul, and we have recourse to them in vain, God, in his mercy, has provided us with a remedy. If we fix our thoughts on our Saviour, and pray

to Him earnestly, he will sooner or later turn our sorrow into joy. But why is it said that when Rhoda did play upon her flute, it produced no echo among the distant hills?

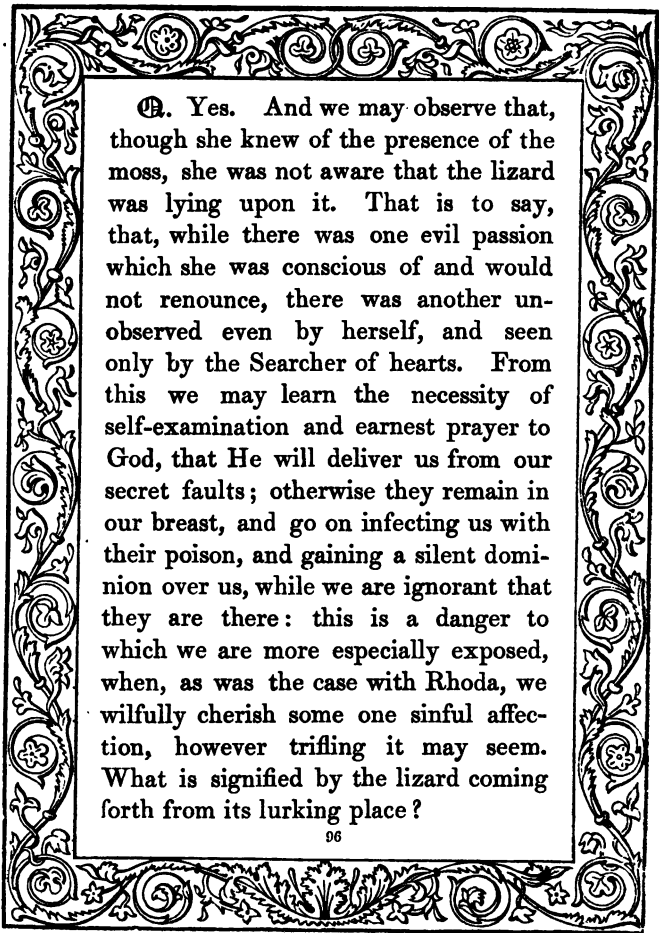
A. Because, when she prayed to God with her lips, her heart was far from Him, and, therefore, her prayer was unanswered.

Q. And why are we told that she saw a dark shadow resting on the eastern mountains, and that the wind that blew from thence seemed cheerless and cold?

A. She was cherishing, in secret, sin that she had professed to renounce, and, therefore, she could find no comfort in religion, but it only awoke in her mind gloomy thoughts and a fear of the judgments of God.

Q. How is the secret sin that she cherished represented in the allegory?

A. By the moss and the lizard that she had concealed in her bosom.



Q. Yes. And we may observe that, though she knew of the presence of the moss, she was not aware that the lizard was lying upon it. That is to say, that, while there was one evil passion which she was conscious of and would not renounce, there was another unobserved even by herself, and seen only by the Searcher of hearts. From this we may learn the necessity of self-examination and earnest prayer to God, that He will deliver us from our secret faults; otherwise they remain in our breast, and go on infecting us with their poison, and gaining a silent dominion over us, while we are ignorant that they are there: this is a danger to which we are more especially exposed, when, as was the case with Rhoda, we wilfully cherish some one sinful affection, however trifling it may seem. What is signified by the lizard coming forth from its lurking place?

A. That a new temptation brought to light the evil passion that lurked in the bosom of Rhoda.

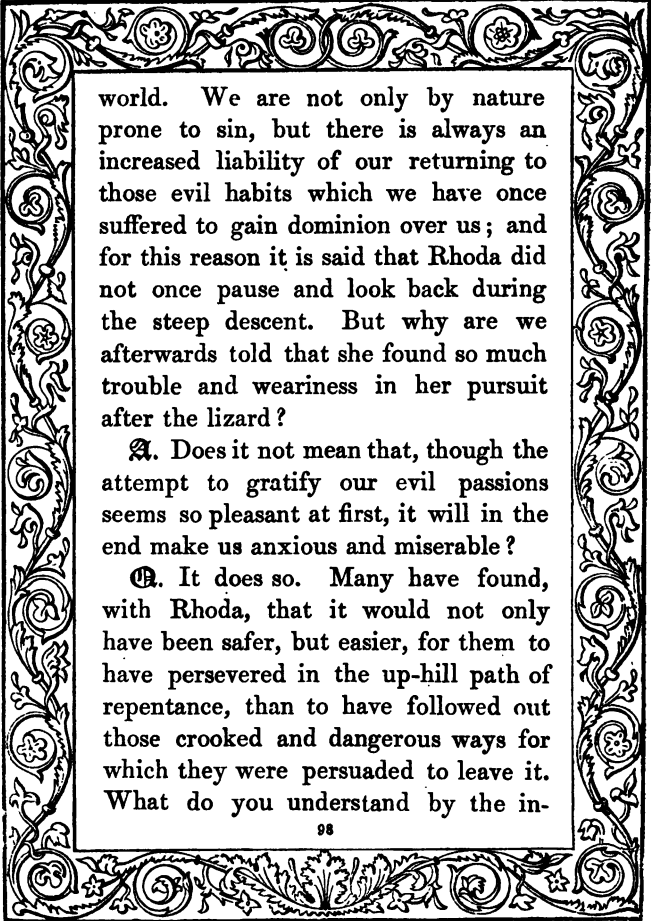
Q. What is meant by her resolution to caress the lizard once more before she parted with it for ever ?

A. She determined that she would once again taste the pleasure of sin before she finally renounced it.

Q. Thus Satan often makes men believe that they are about to indulge in some favourite sin for the last time, and does not allow them to see how far in the ways of wickedness that one indulgence may lead them. Why is it said that Rhoda's path downward was smooth and easy ?

A. Because it is easy to return to the sins we have left.

Q. Yes. There is nothing painful or difficult in giving up the struggle of repentance, and allowing ourselves to fall back upon the pleasures of the



world. We are not only by nature prone to sin, but there is always an increased liability of our returning to those evil habits which we have once suffered to gain dominion over us; and for this reason it is said that Rhoda did not once pause and look back during the steep descent. But why are we afterwards told that she found so much trouble and weariness in her pursuit after the lizard?

A. Does it not mean that, though the attempt to gratify our evil passions seems so pleasant at first, it will in the end make us anxious and miserable?

Q. It does so. Many have found, with Rhoda, that it would not only have been safer, but easier, for them to have persevered in the up-hill path of repentance, than to have followed out those crooked and dangerous ways for which they were persuaded to leave it. What do you understand by the in-

creasing darkness which Rhoda observed as soon as she had caught the lizard?

A. No sooner had she gratified her evil passion, than the fear of death began to steal upon her.

Q. Did this cause her at once to hasten from the wall?

A. No. She still thought she would continue a little while longer in the enjoyment of sin before she attempted to return.

Q. Thus it is that those who begin by wilfully putting off the time of repentance from year to year, still go on deferring it a little while longer, even when they feel their lives to be drawing to a close, and they count by months instead of years the short season they are to remain upon earth. Many who are young and healthy imagine that if sickness or old age were to come upon them, they would have no difficulty in forsaking the world and fixing their

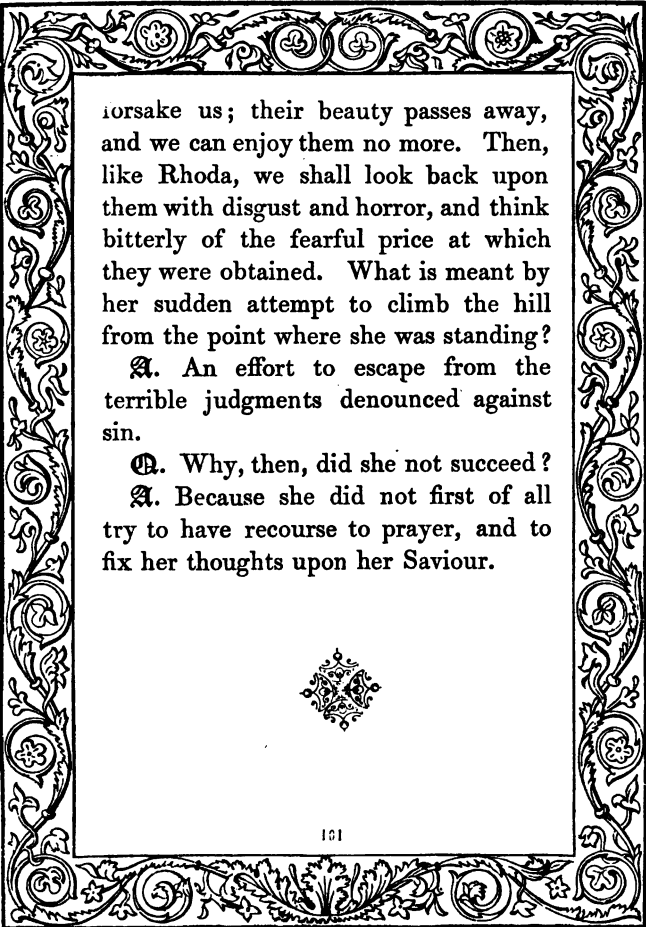
affections upon God. So Rhoda had once believed. And yet when the evening approached, she found repentance no less difficult than before. But why, even if it were easier to return to the service of God in age than in youth, would it be a dangerous thought for us to dwell upon?

A. Because we have no certainty that we shall not die in childhood.

Q. We must never forget that it may please God to suffer the night to close suddenly upon us without allowing us the gradual succession of morning, noon, and evening, which he afforded Rhoda. What do you understand by the death of the lizard?

A. That sin lost its pleasure.

Q. Yes; though the stains of sin, unless we repent, will remain with us for ever, the pleasures of it endure but for a season. We may go on refusing to forsake them until they, in a manner,



iorsake us; their beauty passes away, and we can enjoy them no more. Then, like Rhoda, we shall look back upon them with disgust and horror, and think bitterly of the fearful price at which they were obtained. What is meant by her sudden attempt to climb the hill from the point where she was standing?

A. An effort to escape from the terrible judgments denounced against sin.

Q. Why, then, did she not succeed?

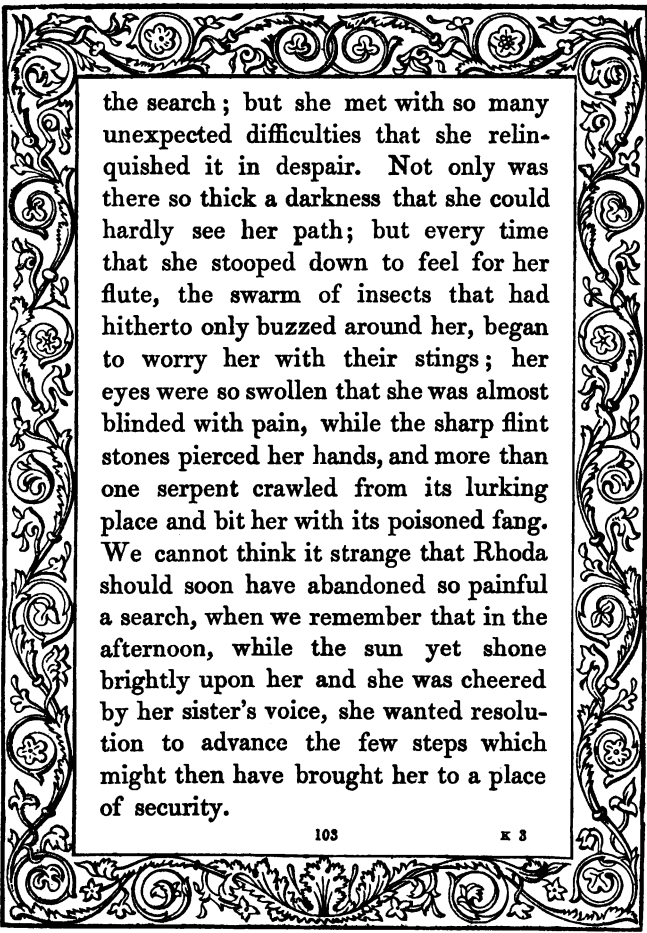
A. Because she did not first of all try to have recourse to prayer, and to fix her thoughts upon her Saviour.



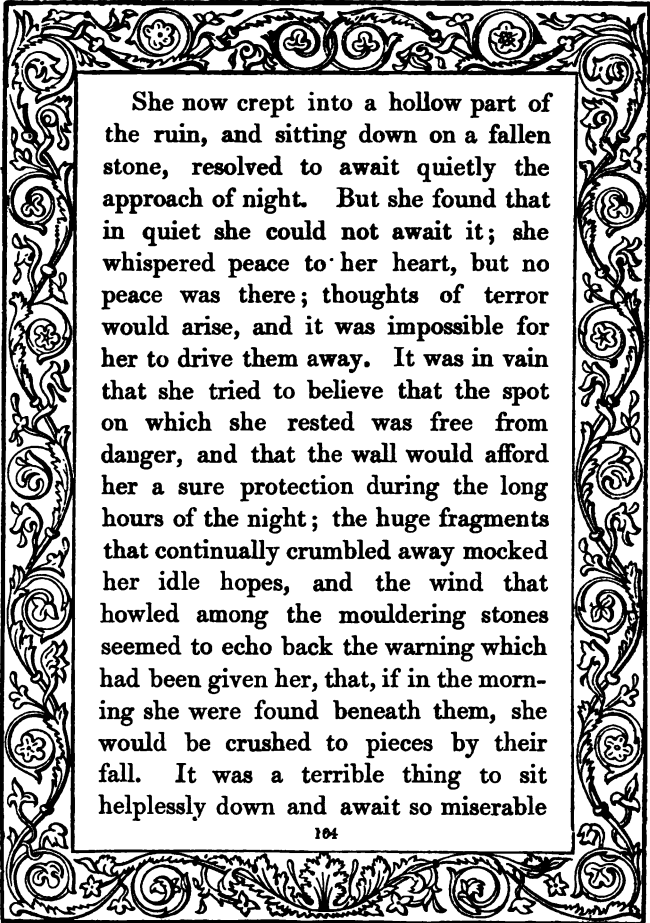
CHAPTER IV.

*Ever the richest, tenderest glow,
Sets round the Autumnal sun—
But there sight fails; no heart may know
The bliss when life is done.*

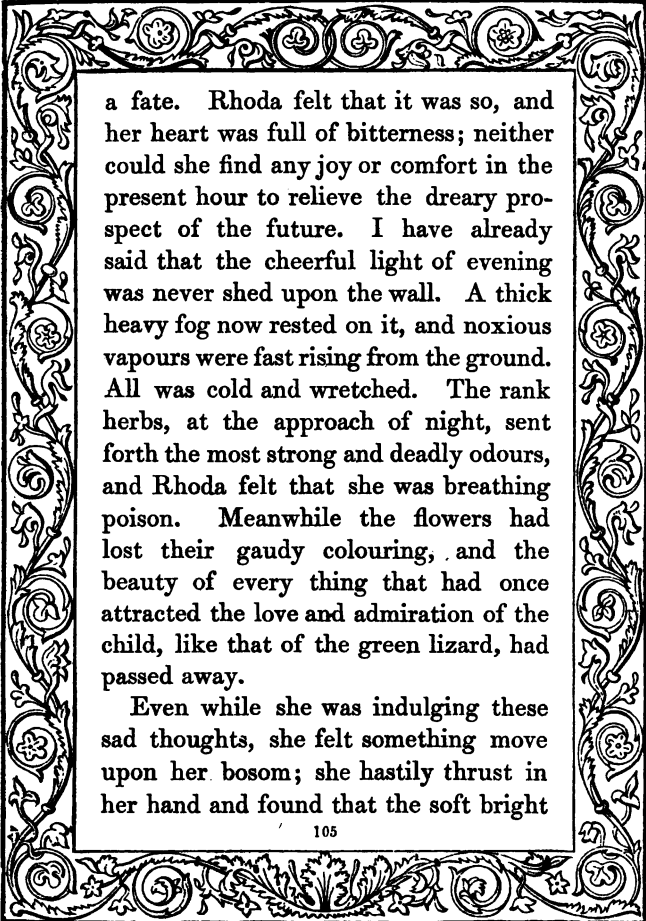
WHILE Rhoda was struggling in vain to ascend the hill, the darkness gradually increased, and she grew more and more alarmed. She cast a fearful glance around, and feeling the full misery of her loneliness, began to think, with bitter regret, of the flute that she had lost. For a few minutes she groped her way over the fallen stones, and sought anxiously for it among the crevices of the wall: happy would it have been for her had she persevered in



the search ; but she met with so many unexpected difficulties that she relinquished it in despair. Not only was there so thick a darkness that she could hardly see her path ; but every time that she stooped down to feel for her flute, the swarm of insects that had hitherto only buzzed around her, began to worry her with their stings ; her eyes were so swollen that she was almost blinded with pain, while the sharp flint stones pierced her hands, and more than one serpent crawled from its lurking place and bit her with its poisoned fang. We cannot think it strange that Rhoda should soon have abandoned so painful a search, when we remember that in the afternoon, while the sun yet shone brightly upon her and she was cheered by her sister's voice, she wanted resolution to advance the few steps which might then have brought her to a place of security.

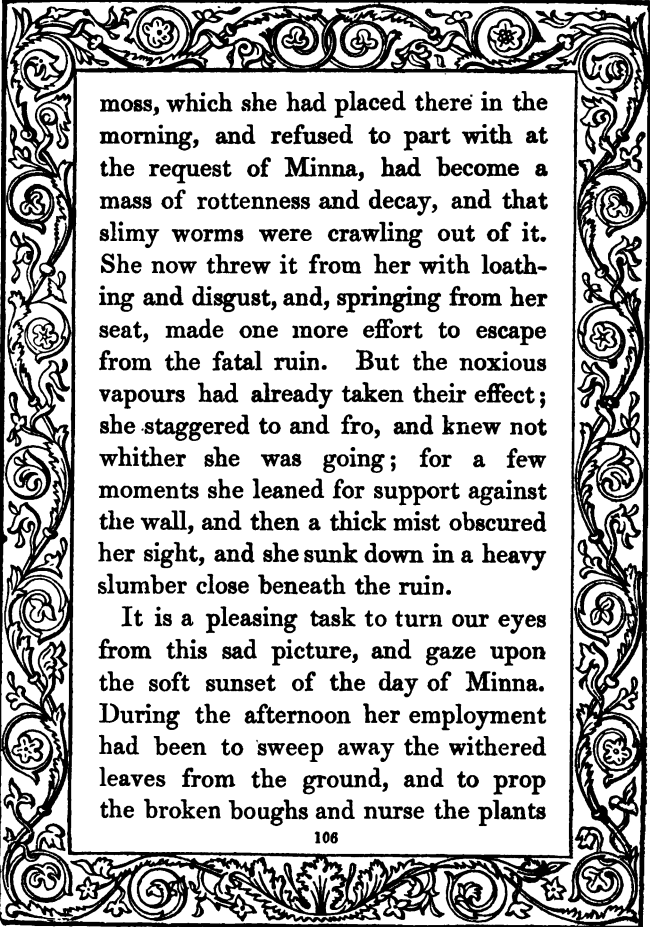


She now crept into a hollow part of the ruin, and sitting down on a fallen stone, resolved to await quietly the approach of night. But she found that in quiet she could not await it; she whispered peace to her heart, but no peace was there; thoughts of terror would arise, and it was impossible for her to drive them away. It was in vain that she tried to believe that the spot on which she rested was free from danger, and that the wall would afford her a sure protection during the long hours of the night; the huge fragments that continually crumbled away mocked her idle hopes, and the wind that howled among the mouldering stones seemed to echo back the warning which had been given her, that, if in the morning she were found beneath them, she would be crushed to pieces by their fall. It was a terrible thing to sit helplessly down and await so miserable



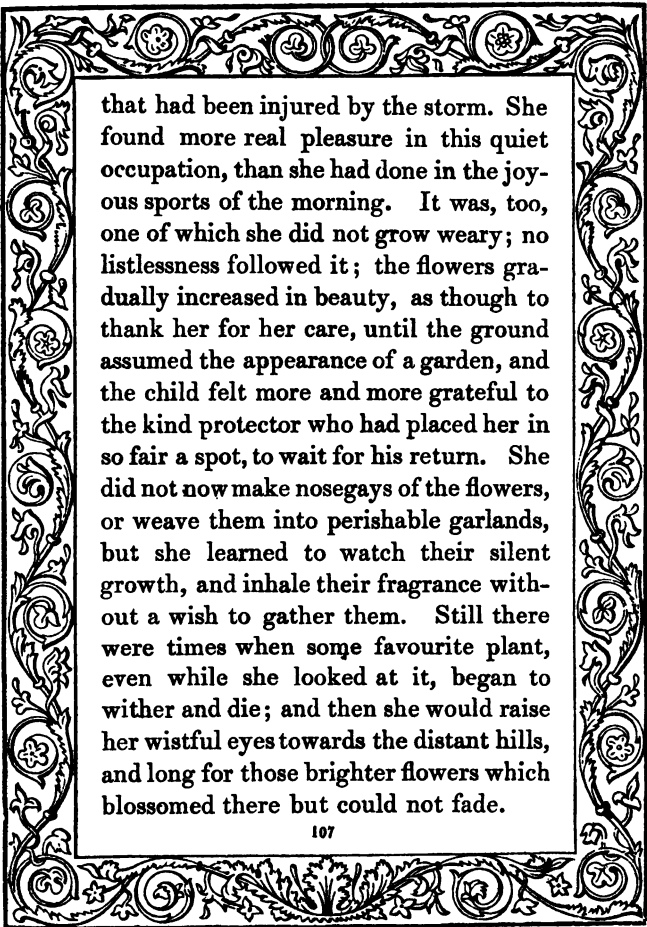
a fate. Rhoda felt that it was so, and her heart was full of bitterness; neither could she find any joy or comfort in the present hour to relieve the dreary prospect of the future. I have already said that the cheerful light of evening was never shed upon the wall. A thick heavy fog now rested on it, and noxious vapours were fast rising from the ground. All was cold and wretched. The rank herbs, at the approach of night, sent forth the most strong and deadly odours, and Rhoda felt that she was breathing poison. Meanwhile the flowers had lost their gaudy colouring, and the beauty of every thing that had once attracted the love and admiration of the child, like that of the green lizard, had passed away.

Even while she was indulging these sad thoughts, she felt something move upon her bosom; she hastily thrust in her hand and found that the soft bright

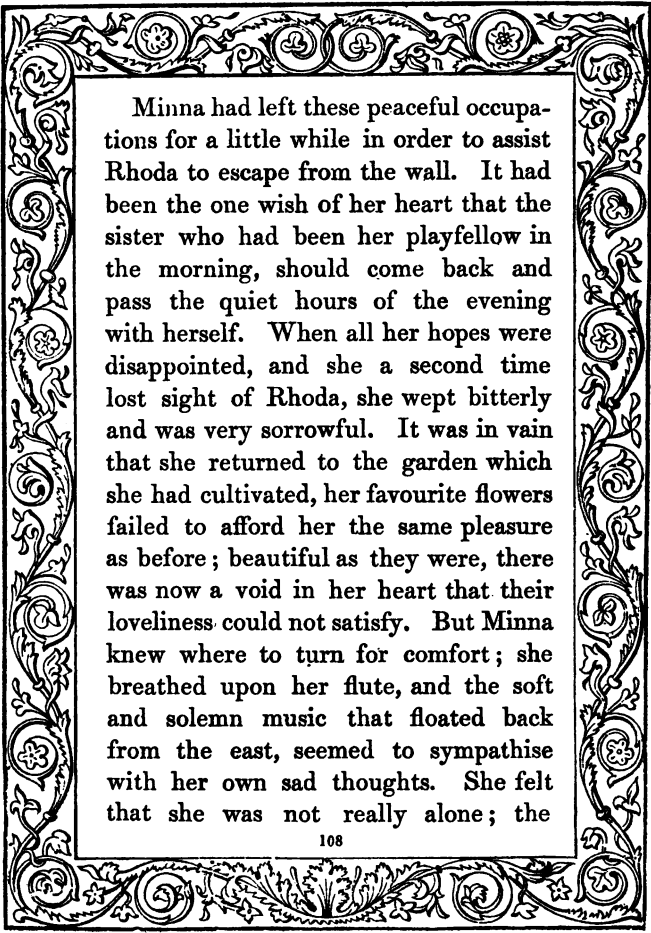


moss, which she had placed there in the morning, and refused to part with at the request of Minna, had become a mass of rottenness and decay, and that slimy worms were crawling out of it. She now threw it from her with loathing and disgust, and, springing from her seat, made one more effort to escape from the fatal ruin. But the noxious vapours had already taken their effect; she staggered to and fro, and knew not whither she was going; for a few moments she leaned for support against the wall, and then a thick mist obscured her sight, and she sunk down in a heavy slumber close beneath the ruin.

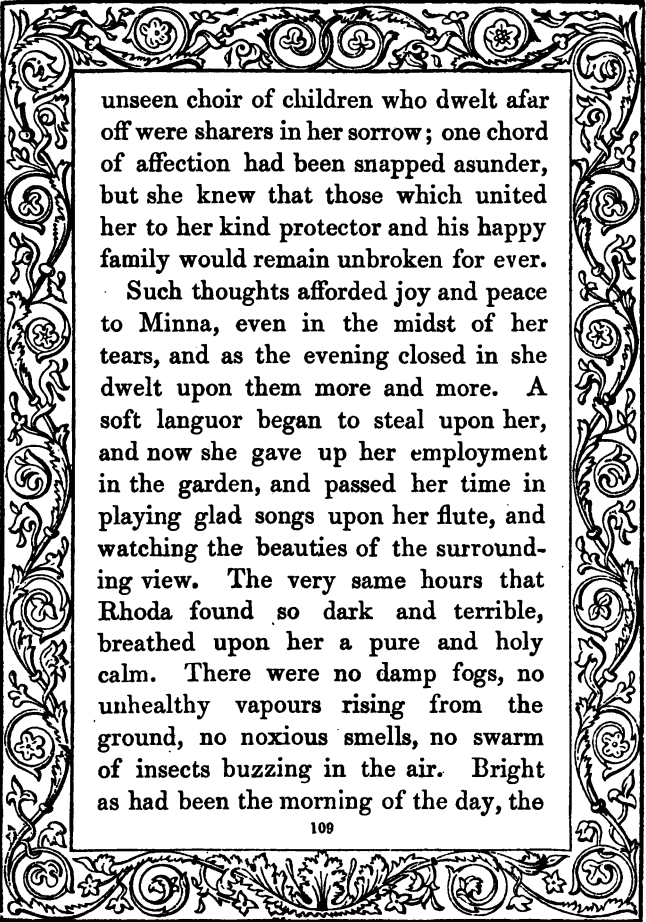
It is a pleasing task to turn our eyes from this sad picture, and gaze upon the soft sunset of the day of Minna. During the afternoon her employment had been to sweep away the withered leaves from the ground, and to prop the broken boughs and nurse the plants



that had been injured by the storm. She found more real pleasure in this quiet occupation, than she had done in the joyous sports of the morning. It was, too, one of which she did not grow weary; no listlessness followed it; the flowers gradually increased in beauty, as though to thank her for her care, until the ground assumed the appearance of a garden, and the child felt more and more grateful to the kind protector who had placed her in so fair a spot, to wait for his return. She did not now make nosegays of the flowers, or weave them into perishable garlands, but she learned to watch their silent growth, and inhale their fragrance without a wish to gather them. Still there were times when some favourite plant, even while she looked at it, began to wither and die; and then she would raise her wistful eyes towards the distant hills, and long for those brighter flowers which blossomed there but could not fade.

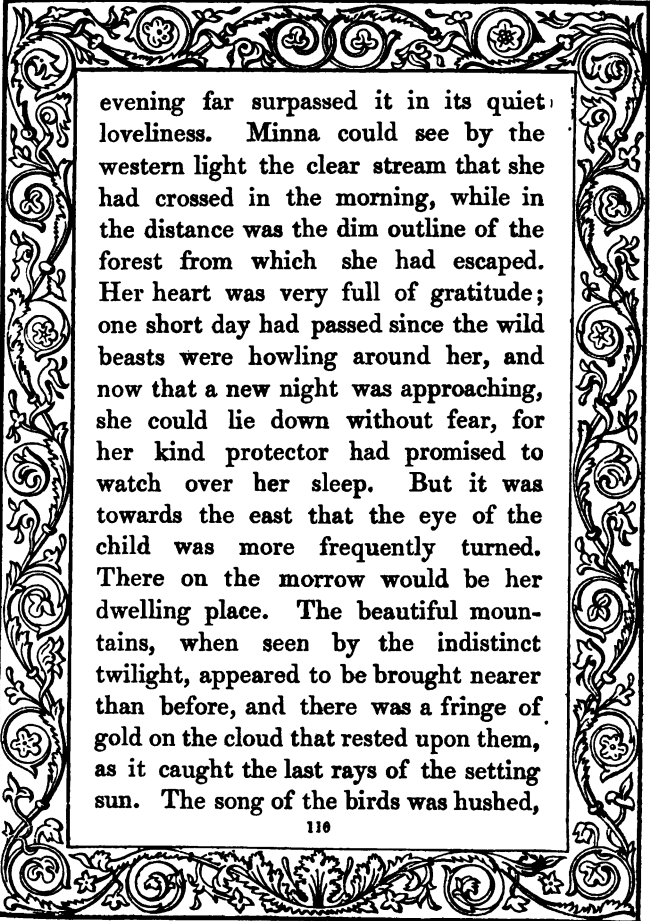


Minna had left these peaceful occupations for a little while in order to assist Rhoda to escape from the wall. It had been the one wish of her heart that the sister who had been her playfellow in the morning, should come back and pass the quiet hours of the evening with herself. When all her hopes were disappointed, and she a second time lost sight of Rhoda, she wept bitterly and was very sorrowful. It was in vain that she returned to the garden which she had cultivated, her favourite flowers failed to afford her the same pleasure as before; beautiful as they were, there was now a void in her heart that their loveliness could not satisfy. But Minna knew where to turn for comfort; she breathed upon her flute, and the soft and solemn music that floated back from the east, seemed to sympathise with her own sad thoughts. She felt that she was not really alone; the

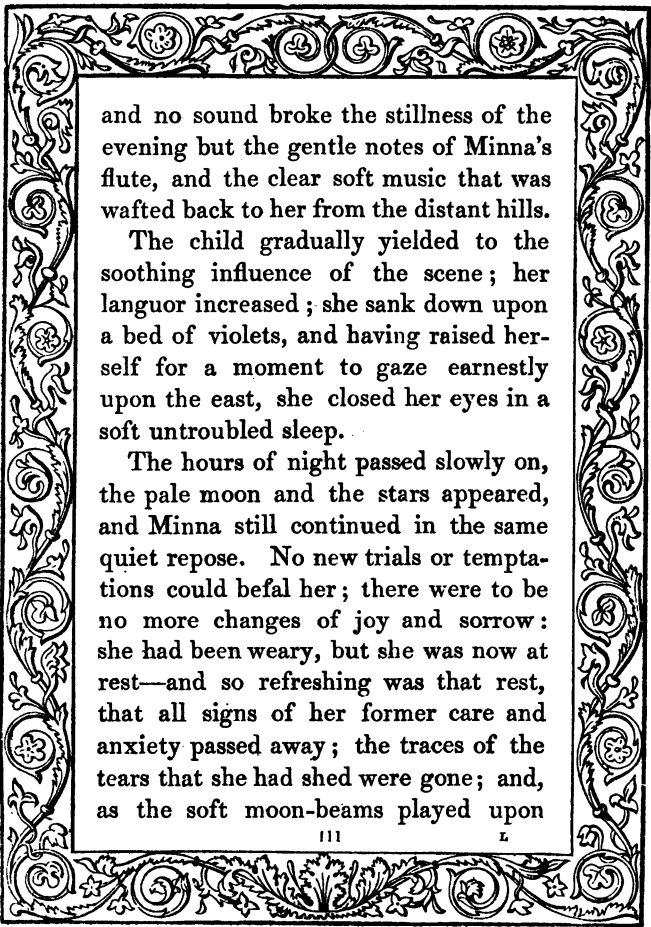


unseen choir of children who dwelt afar off were sharers in her sorrow; one chord of affection had been snapped asunder, but she knew that those which united her to her kind protector and his happy family would remain unbroken for ever.

Such thoughts afforded joy and peace to Minna, even in the midst of her tears, and as the evening closed in she dwelt upon them more and more. A soft languor began to steal upon her, and now she gave up her employment in the garden, and passed her time in playing glad songs upon her flute, and watching the beauties of the surrounding view. The very same hours that Rhoda found so dark and terrible, breathed upon her a pure and holy calm. There were no damp fogs, no unhealthy vapours rising from the ground, no noxious smells, no swarm of insects buzzing in the air. Bright as had been the morning of the day, the



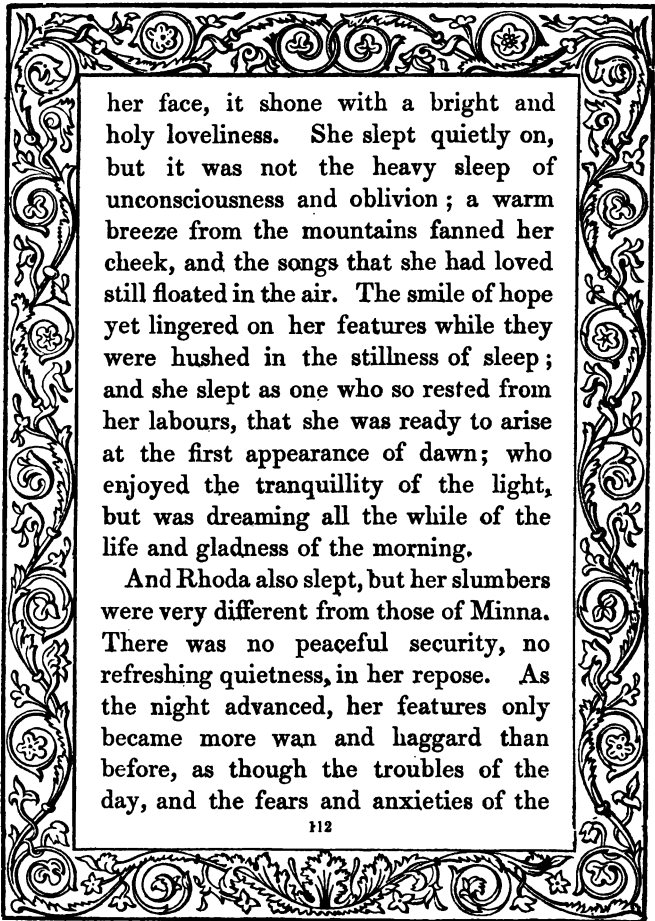
evening far surpassed it in its quiet loveliness. Minna could see by the western light the clear stream that she had crossed in the morning, while in the distance was the dim outline of the forest from which she had escaped. Her heart was very full of gratitude; one short day had passed since the wild beasts were howling around her, and now that a new night was approaching, she could lie down without fear, for her kind protector had promised to watch over her sleep. But it was towards the east that the eye of the child was more frequently turned. There on the morrow would be her dwelling place. The beautiful mountains, when seen by the indistinct twilight, appeared to be brought nearer than before, and there was a fringe of gold on the cloud that rested upon them, as it caught the last rays of the setting sun. The song of the birds was hushed,



and no sound broke the stillness of the evening but the gentle notes of Minna's flute, and the clear soft music that was wafted back to her from the distant hills.

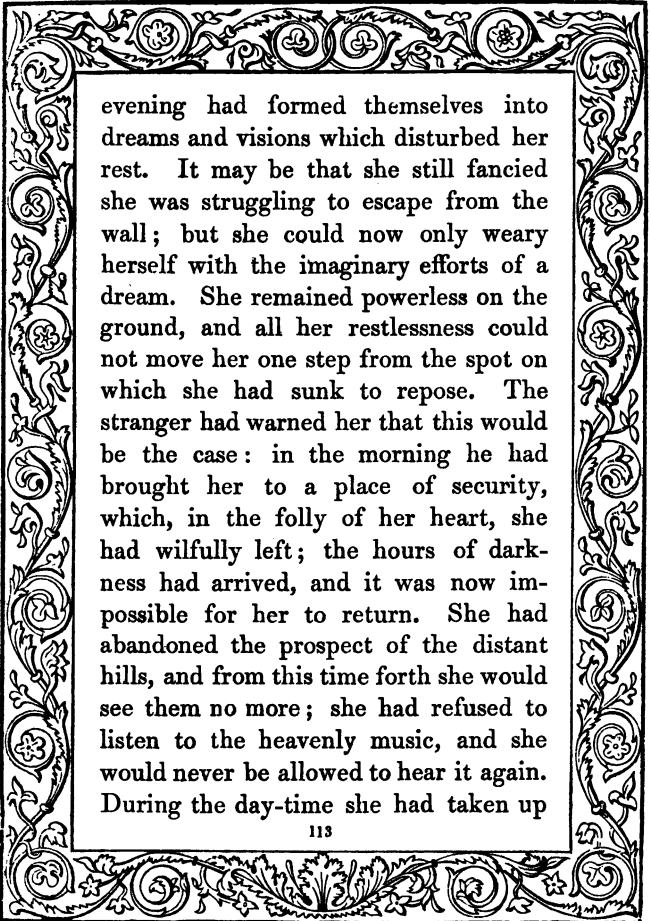
The child gradually yielded to the soothing influence of the scene; her languor increased; she sank down upon a bed of violets, and having raised herself for a moment to gaze earnestly upon the east, she closed her eyes in a soft untroubled sleep.

The hours of night passed slowly on, the pale moon and the stars appeared, and Minna still continued in the same quiet repose. No new trials or temptations could befall her; there were to be no more changes of joy and sorrow: she had been weary, but she was now at rest—and so refreshing was that rest, that all signs of her former care and anxiety passed away; the traces of the tears that she had shed were gone; and, as the soft moon-beams played upon

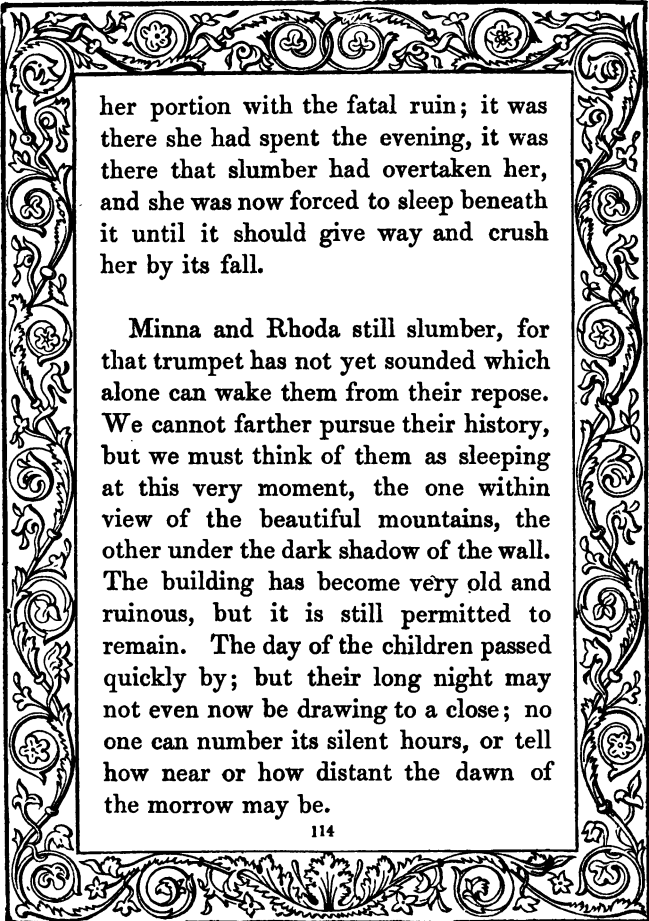


her face, it shone with a bright and holy loveliness. She slept quietly on, but it was not the heavy sleep of unconsciousness and oblivion ; a warm breeze from the mountains fanned her cheek, and the songs that she had loved still floated in the air. The smile of hope yet lingered on her features while they were hushed in the stillness of sleep ; and she slept as one who so rested from her labours, that she was ready to arise at the first appearance of dawn ; who enjoyed the tranquillity of the light, but was dreaming all the while of the life and gladness of the morning.

And Rhoda also slept, but her slumbers were very different from those of Minna. There was no peaceful security, no refreshing quietness, in her repose. As the night advanced, her features only became more wan and haggard than before, as though the troubles of the day, and the fears and anxieties of the

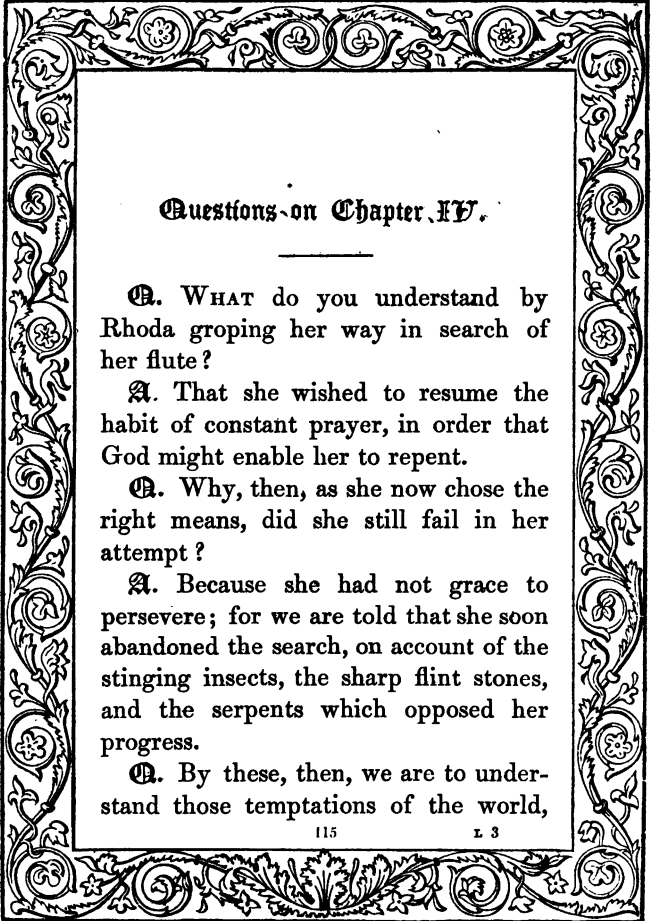


evening had formed themselves into dreams and visions which disturbed her rest. It may be that she still fancied she was struggling to escape from the wall; but she could now only weary herself with the imaginary efforts of a dream. She remained powerless on the ground, and all her restlessness could not move her one step from the spot on which she had sunk to repose. The stranger had warned her that this would be the case: in the morning he had brought her to a place of security, which, in the folly of her heart, she had wilfully left; the hours of darkness had arrived, and it was now impossible for her to return. She had abandoned the prospect of the distant hills, and from this time forth she would see them no more; she had refused to listen to the heavenly music, and she would never be allowed to hear it again. During the day-time she had taken up



her portion with the fatal ruin; it was there she had spent the evening, it was there that slumber had overtaken her, and she was now forced to sleep beneath it until it should give way and crush her by its fall.

Minna and Rhoda still slumber, for that trumpet has not yet sounded which alone can wake them from their repose. We cannot farther pursue their history, but we must think of them as sleeping at this very moment, the one within view of the beautiful mountains, the other under the dark shadow of the wall. The building has become very old and ruinous, but it is still permitted to remain. The day of the children passed quickly by; but their long night may not even now be drawing to a close; no one can number its silent hours, or tell how near or how distant the dawn of the morrow may be.



Questions on Chapter IV.

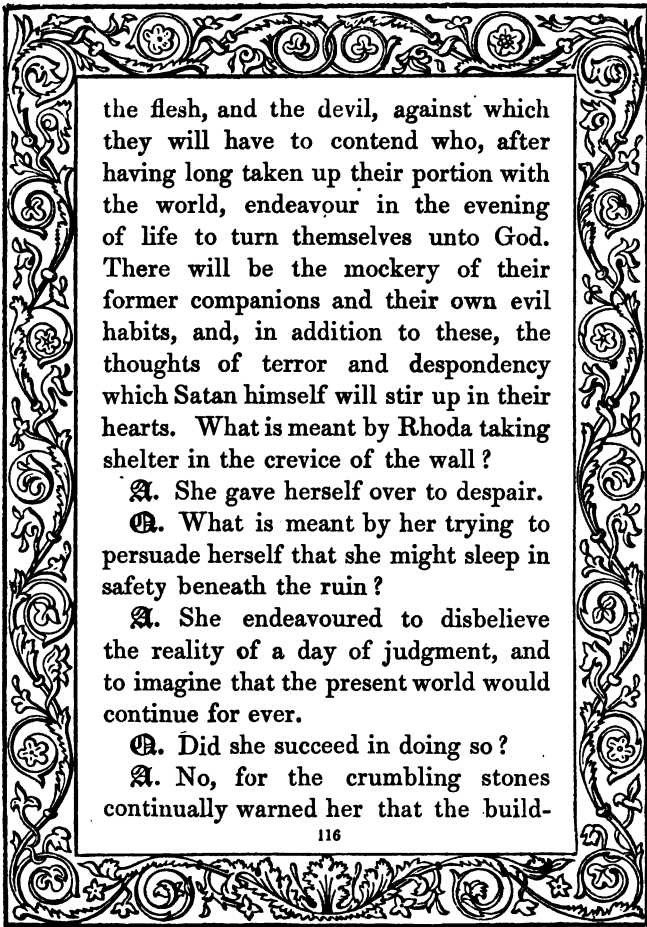
Q. WHAT do you understand by Rhoda groping her way in search of her flute?

A. That she wished to resume the habit of constant prayer, in order that God might enable her to repent.

Q. Why, then, as she now chose the right means, did she still fail in her attempt?

A. Because she had not grace to persevere; for we are told that she soon abandoned the search, on account of the stinging insects, the sharp flint stones, and the serpents which opposed her progress.

Q. By these, then, we are to understand those temptations of the world,



the flesh, and the devil, against which they will have to contend who, after having long taken up their portion with the world, endeavour in the evening of life to turn themselves unto God. There will be the mockery of their former companions and their own evil habits, and, in addition to these, the thoughts of terror and despondency which Satan himself will stir up in their hearts. What is meant by Rhoda taking shelter in the crevice of the wall?

A. She gave herself over to despair.

Q. What is meant by her trying to persuade herself that she might sleep in safety beneath the ruin?

A. She endeavoured to disbelieve the reality of a day of judgment, and to imagine that the present world would continue for ever.

Q. Did she succeed in doing so?

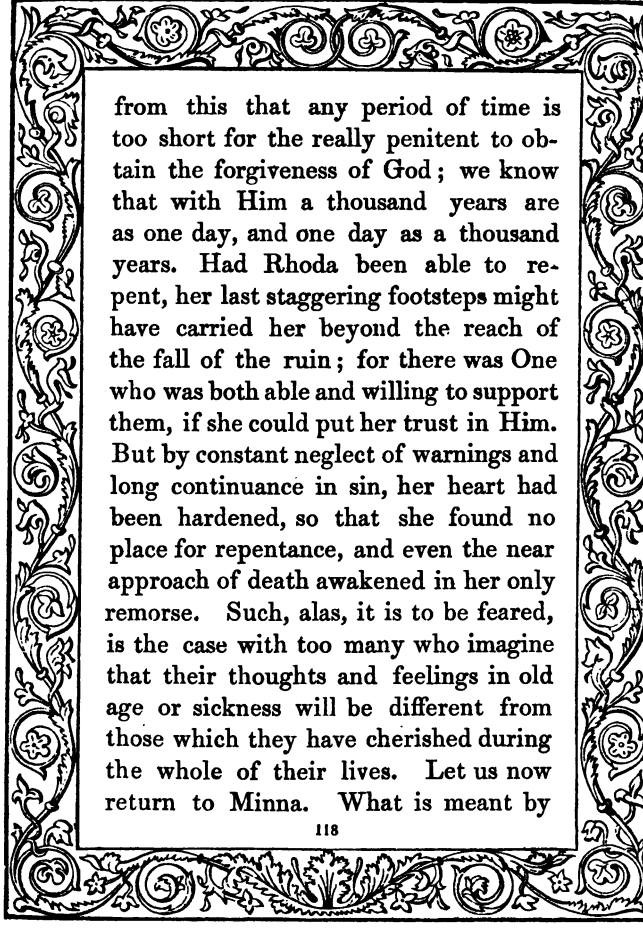
A. No, for the crumbling stones continually warned her that the build-

ing, sooner or later, would crush her by its fall.

Q. Remember, then, that wilful and unrepented sin will bring those who have once tasted the knowledge of the truth into this awful state. They will wish to doubt all that they formerly loved to believe; but they will really be unable to do so. In spite of themselves, each change will remind them that the world in which they trust is fast passing away; and when their last hope of the promises of the gospel is gone, "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" will still remain. Did not Rhoda after this make one last effort to escape from the wall?

A. Yes; when she found that her favourite moss had become putrid and corrupt; but this time sleep overpowered her, and she sank beneath the ruin.

Q. That is to say, she died in her sins. We must not, however, imagine



from this that any period of time is too short for the really penitent to obtain the forgiveness of God ; we know that with Him a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years. Had Rhoda been able to repent, her last staggering footsteps might have carried her beyond the reach of the fall of the ruin ; for there was One who was both able and willing to support them, if she could put her trust in Him. But by constant neglect of warnings and long continuance in sin, her heart had been hardened, so that she found no place for repentance, and even the near approach of death awakened in her only remorse. Such, alas, it is to be feared, is the case with too many who imagine that their thoughts and feelings in old age or sickness will be different from those which they have cherished during the whole of their lives. Let us now return to Minna. What is meant by

her cultivating the ground when the storm had passed by ?

A. That she learned from adversity to seek pleasure in doing good to others.

Q. And why are we told that the flowers she loved best still withered and died ?

A. Is it because in this life not even charity itself can secure us from disappointment ?

Q. It is so. And God has doubtless ordained that it should be so, in order to teach us, like Minna, to fix our best hopes and affections upon Heaven. What do you understand by the period when she gave up her employment in the garden ?

A. The time when sickness interrupted her earthly occupations, and she was able to devote herself entirely to prayer and holy meditation.

Q. What is meant by the beauty and quietness of the evening ?

Q. The peaceful end of the righteous.

A. It is not, however, any outward peace that is here referred to ; for good men may, like the holy martyrs, die in the midst of much apparent pain and suffering. But, whatever be their bodily anguish, they will have within the peace of God that passeth man's understanding. The distant hills will seem to approach near them, and the fringe of gold will rest upon the cloud. Do you remember the vision that cheered the last moments of St. Stephen ?

A. It is said that he saw the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

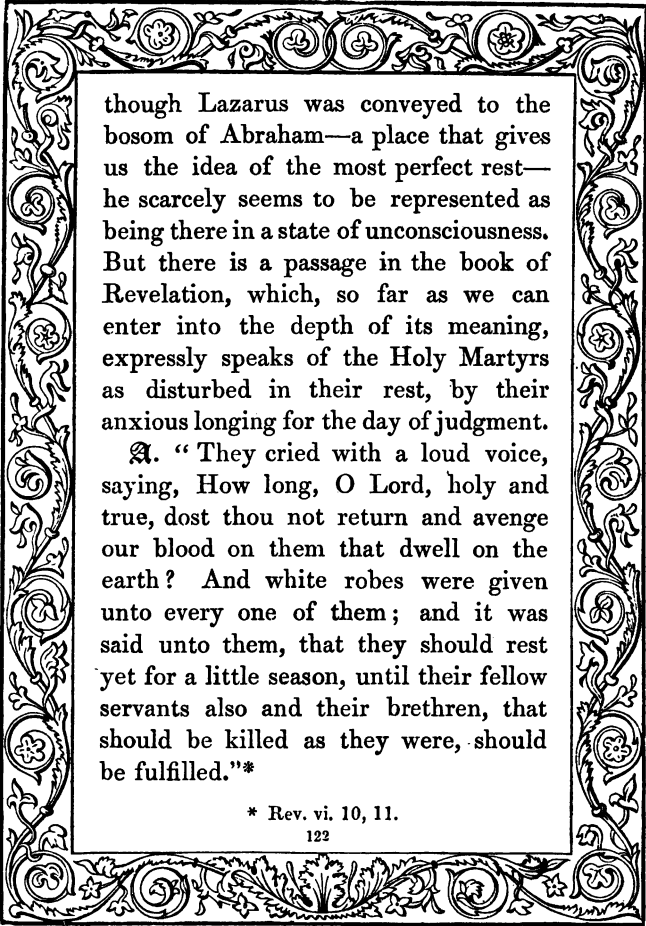
A. Yes, and though he was killed by stones, nothing could be more tranquil than the description of his death : it is merely written that " he fell asleep." Can you recollect any parable of our Saviour in which death is spoken of as a period of sleep ?

A. That of the wise and foolish virgins. We are told that while the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.

Q. And so also in the Old Testament, in speaking of the deaths of the Kings of Israel and Judah, it is generally said of each of them that "he slept with his fathers." Thus, then, we may regard the good and bad alike as sleeping from the hour of death to the day of judgment. They have to wait till the night is over before they are either received into their happy home or crushed by the fall of the ruin. This will be the case with all except those who will still be found upon earth at the second advent of Christ. But is there any other parable which appears to imply that there will be a consciousness in that sleep?

A. That of the rich man and Lazarus.

Q. Yes, the rich man is certainly spoken of as sensible of pain, and



though Lazarus was conveyed to the bosom of Abraham—a place that gives us the idea of the most perfect rest—he scarcely seems to be represented as being there in a state of unconsciousness. But there is a passage in the book of Revelation, which, so far as we can enter into the depth of its meaning, expressly speaks of the Holy Martyrs as disturbed in their rest, by their anxious longing for the day of judgment.

A. “They cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not return and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”*

* Rev. vi. 10, 11.

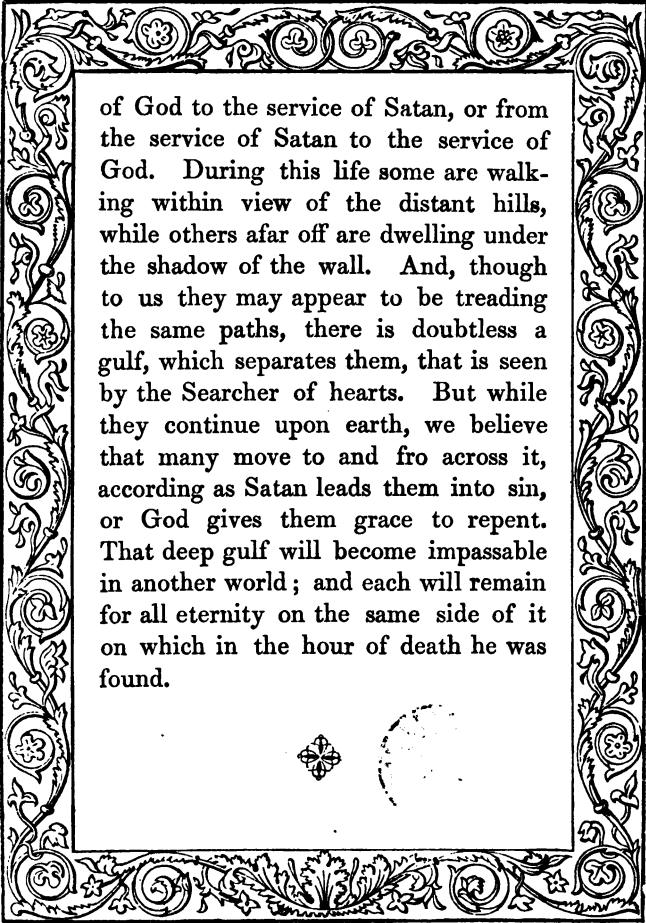
Q. From all this, then, we may learn that, to those who die before Christ's second coming, there will be a certain interval between the time of their trial upon earth, and the day at which they will finally render in their account to God ; and further it would appear, that, during this interval, the good and the bad will alike have their visions; the one of hope, the other of anguish and terror. How is this represented in the allegory?

A. By the smile that rested on the features of Minna, and the troubled sleep of Rhoda.

Q. Why is it said that Rhoda could then make only the imaginary efforts of a dream?

A. Because nothing that we can do after death, will enable us to escape the punishment due to our sins.

Q. Yes. It will be then impossible for us either to change from the service



of God to the service of Satan, or from the service of Satan to the service of God. During this life some are walking within view of the distant hills, while others afar off are dwelling under the shadow of the wall. And, though to us they may appear to be treading the same paths, there is doubtless a gulf, which separates them, that is seen by the Searcher of hearts. But while they continue upon earth, we believe that many move to and fro across it, according as Satan leads them into sin, or God gives them grace to repent. That deep gulf will become impassable in another world; and each will remain for all eternity on the same side of it on which in the hour of death he was found.





